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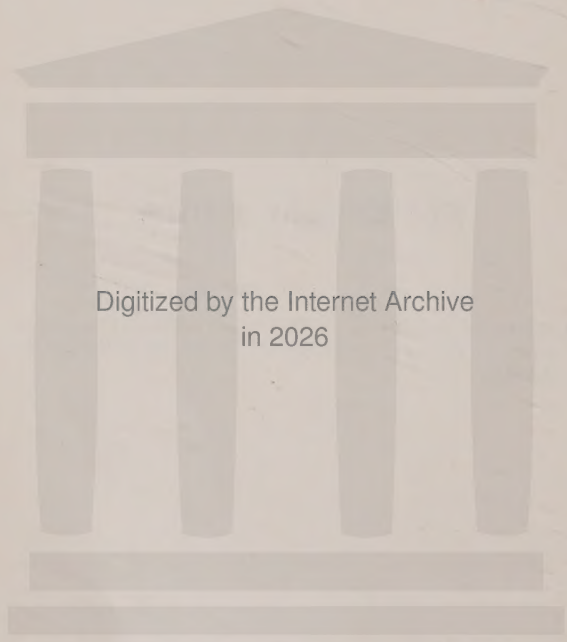

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POPULAR CHRISTIANITY:

ITS

TRANSITION STATE,
AND PROBABLE DEVELOPMENT.

BY

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"Non Deos vulgi negare profanum: sed vulgi opiniones Diis applicare profanum."—EPICURUS.

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PREFACE.

I AM anxious to anticipate a probable misapprehension of the object of these pages, by declaring that I am far from wishing to establish Christianity on a basis merely *rationalistic*. I by no means assert the rightful authority of simple reason over the higher instincts of the soul (for this would be to subordinate the conscience, which is the interpreter of the inner life, to the understanding, which is a co-ordinate power), but I am anxious to establish the actual *identity* of the highest results of reason and conscience. A Christianity truly Catholic must offend neither the reason nor the conscience, but, whilst acknowledging the "Divinity that dwells within us," do no violence to that natural reason which forms the essential law of our outward life. It is true, indeed (though in a sense far different from that in which the dogma is generally received), that the Christian must "walk by faith and not by sight;" but it is true, also, that no faculty bestowed upon us is to be superseded by the exaggerated

pretensions of any other; and the aid of natural reason is required to check the wanderings of the imagination. The harmony of the Divine law is as evident in the moral as in the material world, and every faculty that has been given us has its proper place in the economy of our moral life. Reason, however, has, in reality, no power over the true inspiration of conscience, and the pure faith of the soul, like a polished mirror, reflects without receiving the light of the understanding.

The characteristic tendency of the last few centuries has been towards a cold and faithless utilitarianism, and Religion herself has been tainted with the moral leprosy of the times. This deadly heresy has been met by the opposite extreme, of an exaggerated and superstitious pretension to spirituality. On the one hand we have the open neglect of the inner life, and on the other a near approach to the consecration of relics, and a belief in the "real presence,"—in miracles still performed, and prophecies still in the course of fulfilment*.

The world has, I believe, at the present time, a painful secret at its heart, which it is in vain endeavouring to utter. When the true word is spoken, men will once more "leave all and follow." All true and sincere men well know that Christianity is not realised in the religion of the multitude. Every

* Witness Allies's "Journal in France," and "Fleming's Prophecies."

sect, indeed, has its pure and heroic spirits, but they are so, not in consequence but in spite of their dogmatic creeds, whilst the feeble and faithless of every communion are overwhelmed by the influence of the "written word." "The kingdom of Christ" is *within us*, and Christianity will not have performed its proper office in the world until professing believers have learnt to recognise the rights and privileges of conscience by a toleration without limits, and a faith without contention.

The image of religion presented to the popular mind, through the distorted media of articled Churches, is not loved and reverenced by the body of the people. Professing a common creed, men hate, revile, and persecute each other, and the spirit of Christianity is entirely forgotten by those who have its doctrines, as they are called, for ever on their lips. The admitted characteristic of the religion of Christ is its universal applicability to human life, but in the present age it has become

"From man's life a thing apart."

Our Protestant Reformers, in proscribing the abuse of religious festivals and holidays, entirely overlooked their uses, as connecting religion with common life; and even the sanctifying influence of daily devotion was superseded, because the priesthood had become corrupt, and their creed incredible. We now hear it commonly confessed, without compunction, by men actively engaged in the traffic of the world, that "they are not religious men," a

confession that would have deeply scandalised an age of greater religious sincerity, though it becomes almost venial when the popular creed is found at variance with the exercise of the understanding. Religion thus appears to want the *reality* it possessed, even in the darkest ages of the Church. The only cure, I repeat, for these anomalies in the religious life, is to bring the principles of our creed into unison at once with the revelations of the conscience, and the light of natural reason, by showing that the freest exercise of the latter is consistent with a perfect obedience to the dictates of the former.

I have strongly protested against the *finality* so generally conceded to the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and the shallow (so called) "evangelical" Christianity that has been founded upon it. It seems to be supposed that to protest against Popery was to establish God's truth in the world. The awakened intelligence of the age, however, now expects something more from that great historical event than the barren triumph of one sect over another, and regards the Protestantism of the Reformation as no more final than the rival decrees of the Council of Trent. A religion founded on protests is, at best, but a negative one; and, if the attempt be continued to establish the finality of the Reformed religion, the world will soon be in protest against Protestantism itself.

Men are still disputing with all the unchastened violence of party passions about the spirit and

object of the Reformation, and how many colours does it present to the diseased vision of heated controversialists! We are told by Mr. Palmer, in his recent Church History, that the Reformers were called Protestants not for protesting against Popery, but against the edict of Spires; and the Augsburg Confession declares "that Protestants differ in *no article of Faith* from the Catholic Church; that there is nothing in it which differs from Scripture or the Church of Rome." If this view of the matter be the true one, the modern Dissenter is farther in advance of the existing Establishment, in spiritual intelligence, than the Protestant of the Reformation was in advance of the Church of Rome. But is Protestant Dissent more likely to be final than Protestant Churchmanship? and, if so, to which of its Protean forms do we owe our allegiance?

The state of religious anarchy so visible around us is acknowledged by the convulsive struggles both of Churchmen and Dissenters for the attainment of some definite principle of permanence and repose; and, after the vain experience of eighteen centuries, men still dream of establishing Christianity on the basis of a dogmatic theology. Everything is being done for the Church except giving her a Catholic spirit. When she has no audible voice for the people, a vain cry is raised for the increase of her churches and the augmentation of her ministers, that she may extend the circle of her acknowledged inefficiency. Men ask for religion

and are answered by churches—they ask for bread and receive a stone.

The material interests of the Church, alone, occupy the minds of statesmen, who appear to imagine that a false and lifeless theology will gain purity by diffusion. The world is yearning for a higher spiritual civilization, and her recognised priesthood is endeavouring either to restore the faith of the middle ages, or, at most, to merge the divine philosophy of Christ in the Reformation of Luther. When the spiritual wants and desires of the age are thus at variance with the inspirations of its anointed teachers, a vital and organic change in the national creed appears necessary and inevitable. "There is no legitimate escape," says an able anonymous critic*, "from the effects of such teaching, except by throwing aside authority, or submitting implicitly to its guidance. But such guidance is not acknowledged in the Reformed Church. If the understanding and the judgment are driven out of that Church . . . . . she loses at once all that has hitherto constituted her character and strength. Nay, more, she will be doomed to see a speedy desertion from her ranks, so large as to compel a fresh distribution of her money and lands, and she will be left as poor as she pretends to be apostolical. Her authority is derived from the Bible, and her payments from the state. If the one

* See a Review of Allies's "Journal in France" in the "Examiner," April 21, 1849.

continue to be openly violated, let her beware that the other is not suddenly withdrawn. The English people are as little disposed now as they were a couple of hundred years since, to find their religious nutriment in a warmed-up hash of stale superstitions."

I embrace this opportunity of stating that, during the progress of these pages through the press, I have been assured by a friend of Dr. Hampden's that the date of his (Dr. H.'s) acquaintance with the late Blanco White precludes the possibility of his having borrowed his notions of the scholastic theology from that writer. It appears that Dr. Hampden had contributed his "Life of Aquinas" (which contains the germ of these opinions) to the Encyclopædia Metropolitana previous to his acquaintance with Blanco White. I regret that I have received this information too late to enable me to erase from my book the passage in which I have repeated this impeachment of the originality of the Bampton Lectures, which originally appeared in a leading article of the "Times" newspaper.

Bwlch-Gwyn.
June 7th, 1849.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

Page

CONDITION OF THE CHURCHES 1

CHAPTER II.

INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES 42

CHAPTER III.

MIRACLES AND PROPHECY 80

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST 131

CHAPTER V.

DOCTRINES AND ARTICLES 162

CHAPTER VI.

PROSPECTS AND CONCLUSION 196

POPULAR CHRISTIANITY:

ITS

TRANSITION STATE, AND PROBABLE DEVELOPMENT.

CHAPTER I.

CONDITION OF THE CHURCHES.

THE time has, I believe, arrived, when the popular religion throughout the Christian world is about to undergo a purification similar to that effected for natural science by the genius of Bacon*. The dogmas of religion and those of unreformed philosophy had, alike, their origin in the scholastic perversions of dialectical science; and when such an

* It is distinctly stated by Bacon, Aphorism 127, "Novum Organum," that he contemplated the application of his philosophical system to ethics. We learn from Schlegel that not only were the doctrines of the Church worked out by the logic of Aristotle, but that the version of his writings in use in the Church was disfigured by coming through the medium of an *Arabic* translation! See "Philosophy of History," page 376.

admission is candidly made by a Protestant bishop*, we may fairly expect, at least, a considerable relaxation of the doctrinal system of the Church. The precise and dogmatical Christianity, that now avails only to embitter the controversies of the learned, and to mystify and puzzle the laity, will be superseded, and the vital elements of Christian philosophy will be presented to the people, in a rational and intelligible form. The "Church of the future" will be the reflection of the spiritual condition of the world of *to-day*, and not the lifeless image of a bygone age. Christians will not, much longer, dispute whether they shall adopt the language of the Nicene age, or of that of the Protestant Reformation—of the Tractarian or Tridentine theology, in their confessions or liturgies. The mind of the 19th century has a growing tendency to a reliance rather upon "*insight*" than upon "*tradition*," and the memories of the past, and will have its own appropriate expression in religious faith, as well as in philosophy and science. It is as little disposed to borrow its theology from Athanasius, or from Cranmer, as it is to adopt the philosophy of Aristotle, or the science of Archimedes, in exclusion of the higher insight of Bacon or of Locke—of Newton—of Humboldt—of Leverrier, or of Berzelius. The revelations of God to man will not be looked for, alone, in the plains of Palestine—in the valley of the Jordan, or in the land of Goshen; nor will they, any longer, be consi-

* Dr. Hampden.

dered as exclusively confined to the writings of Jewish prophets, or Christian evangelists. It has been said, that to seek our divinity in books is "to seek the living amongst the dead," and to confine the spiritual bounty of God to primitive and barbarous ages, is virtually to deny those attributes of perpetual and omnipresent justice and mercy with which every rational creed has hitherto invested Him.

It is beginning to be felt, that a vital and fruitful faith cannot repose on a merely dogmatic foundation. It is, after all, the *will* (as Schlegel* has observed) which here generally decides; and the creed has yet to be invented that shall define, in words, the spiritual wants and desires of mankind. The most discordant controversialists have agreed in repudiating the dogmatic pretensions of the Church; and Dr. Priestley and the Bishop of Hereford, Blanco White† and Isaac Taylor (disagreeing about everything else), are unanimous in protesting against the arrogant assumptions of scholasticism.

The utmost that has, hitherto, been achieved by churches, has been to erect barriers, more or less effectual, to check the wanderings of the imagination, and to expound, in loose and general terms, the spiritual instincts of mankind. These instincts have, of course, been found to vary with the changing forms of civilization. The secular arm has

* See "Philosophy of History," sect. 2.

† See Letter to Martineau in the Appendix to the "Rationale of Religious Enquiry."

supported the external defences of orthodoxy, in the darker ages of the world—the connection of the civil and religious powers has preserved them, in comparative integrity, down to our own times: and, at present, the union of church and state is the means by which the doctrines of the church are imposed, nominally, upon the laity.

After all, however, the tests of orthodoxy adopted by all "articled" churches are purely imaginary. The difference between those whose test of orthodoxy is a belief in the scriptures themselves, and those who insist on the interpretations of the Church, is one of degree of faith, rather than of principle. Human language (and such I presume is the language of the scriptures), whether it express the sentiments of the apostles, or of our Protestant reformers, is equally liable to a variety of interpretations. Believers may be united by a general community of feeling and religious sentiment, but never by an adherence to a dogmatical creed. A definition of the faith of a church is, in any but the darkest age, a challenge to the rebellious reason and spiritual freedom of the people. The *authority* of the scriptures, therefore, must depend on some secret spiritual charm that they possess, when regarded as a whole, and not on any "private interpretation" of their meaning; and the only real bond of union amongst believers must be a common understanding of the spirit of these writings. The true test of Christian discipleship is the possession of the "spirit of Christ." Amidst the strife of religious parties, the

simplest principles for which they are contending are entirely forgotten, or it would be unnecessary to enunciate these self-evident and familiar propositions. The high and low churchman alike appeal, I repeat, to a purely imaginary test of orthodoxy, and the actual result is a creed, within the Church, as unsettled as human opinion. The paid servants, indeed, of every sect, preserve an outward uniformity, as the condition of preserving their characters and their salaries; but from the layman, the nominal creed of his church receives little more than an indolent assent; and his private opinions are either those of the minister by whom he chances to be instructed, or of an enlightened common sense, brought to bear in a rational interpretation of the scriptures. Can it be said, then, that a *visible church* actually exists in the present age? or, if existing, that it has any *real authority?*

But, let it not be supposed that the protest of an intelligent age will be confined to the arbitrary definitions of a pedantic theology. A vast amount of corruption, even of the spirit of the Christian philosophy, has been generated by, and is reflected in, the popular creed: and, to restore the teaching of Christ to its original purity, it will be necessary, not only to repudiate the interpretations of the Church, but to overthrow the vast and complicated edifice of superstition that has been erected on that shifting foundation. With the general diffusion of knowledge amongst the people, a Christianity without superstition—the only basis of a really catholic

creed—may become possible. The elements of such a creed may, even now, be lying scattered about the intellectual world; but to insure its acceptance the Gospel must be regarded not as "dropped from the clouds like a meteoric stone" (to use the language of Sterling*), but "as rising into view—the purest portion of a vein coeval with the creation." The "essence of Christianity" is assumed by Ullman to be the "union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ;"† and a liberal interpretation of the doctrine which is here asserted, and which I shall elsewhere discuss, will furnish a common ground upon which a great variety of contending sects may meet together in Christian fellowship; provided only that the doctrine be left to its simple scriptural expression, untrammelled by the rigid terminology of the schools. And if this golden rule should be freely applied to every other doctrine in the popular creed which is offensive to the natural reason of mankind, though this might occasionally ruffle the complacency of the formalist, it would in no way affect the true and spiritual believer. For it is, after all, by abandoning the instruction of the conscience, and rejecting the first principles of right reason—by regarding the letter rather than the spirit of the scriptures—the outward rather than the inner life—that we lose that "union with God" the realization of which is the end and purpose of the

* See Letter to Archdeacon Hare.

† See Ullman's "Essence of Christianity," page 70.

religion of Christ, and of which he was himself the bright example.

And now let us seek, in the present anomalous condition of the Christian world, for those elements out of which we may venture to hope that a purer and more comprehensive creed may hereafter be constructed. In the present age, the popular Christianity, including almost every form in which the idea of a written revelation has been hitherto embodied, is undergoing an "experimentum crucis" under the hands of philosophy; and its most secret diseases are being daily exposed on the dissecting table to the searching eye of science. The dry bones of all churches are beginning to stir; and, (like dead bodies under the stroke of a galvanic battery,) even the most obsolete and supercannuated superstitions receive a momentary and spasmodic vitality from the shock of controversial excitement. From the ancient heart of Christendom, from Rome herself, a faint pulsation is still felt through the decaying members, and a lingering hope seems to be entertained that "new wine" may be put into "old bottles." But, alas! there is treason in the very citadel of orthodoxy; and the republicans of New York have been actually voting an address to the Holy Father of the Church*, for his exertions in the cause of human liberty! The English Church, however, is, perhaps, the most afflicted member of this band of martyrs, as she is assailed, at once, by

* See "Times" newspaper, 1848.

secret treason and by open violence. It was long ago said by Gibbon, that "the pillars of revelation are shaken by those who preserve the name without the substance of religion—who indulge the licence without the temper of philosophy." The "candid friends" and liberal critics of the English Church have assumed precisely the attitude described by the acute and learned historian—they are endeavouring to reconcile the humility of faith with the arrogance of philosophy. The author of "Ancient Christianity," who writes himself Church of Englandman and Episcopalian, and who fights under the banners of the evangelical clergy, has systematically endeavoured to undermine the foundations of Episcopacy, and shake the pillars of the Church. The grossest superstition, he tells us, prevailed in the Church even from the Apostolic age*, and its earliest literature was tainted with Platonism, with Gnosticism, and even with Buddhism. The clever, but most inconsequential writer of this dashing performance, whilst thus describing the primitive condition of the Church, receives, nevertheless, with the humble obedience of faith, the most tremendous doctrines of the Nicene Council! This is, surely, to write too adventurously for a Churchman, and too timidly for a philosopher.

The section of the Church, distinguished as the

* And yet upon this credulous, corrupt, and superstitious testimony we must mainly rely for establishing the genuineness, the authenticity, and the canonicity of the Scriptures. Surely Dr. Wiseman is being avenged.

"Evangelical," have been gradually undermining, for centuries, its original foundations; and the ill-success of their high-Church opponents, in their attempt to make a stand on the old system of teaching, is a significant event in the modern history of the Church. In the hands of these spiritual reformers the two Sacraments appear in danger of sharing the fate of the five others repudiated at the Reformation. Baptism, by a kind of religious rationalism, is nearly deprived of its mysterious character, and the Eucharist is almost reduced to a merely commemorative rite. In reference to the external government of the Church, the modern Puritan, like his forefathers, is found to unite the despotism of religious exclusiveness with a grovelling spirit of democracy. They who anticipate any accession of strength to the Church from the zeal of the Evangelical clergy, are little aware of the real character of that fatal ally. The labours of Wesley and of Whitfield, whilst they exposed the doctrinal errors of the Church, did but little damage to the principle upon which it is established; but their modern imitators, both within and without her pale, are undermining at once her constitution and her creed. They are at once rationalistic and fanatical, and a vague latitudinarianism is thinly concealed by a religious phraseology.

The recent struggle for supremacy, between high and low Churchmen, has exposed to the philosophic eye their common weakness, and displayed the doubtful temper of their weapons. On the one hand,

it has raised up a host of adventurous explorers of those tender portions of ecclesiastical history over which the piety or policy of the Church has been anxious to cast a veil of religious mystery; whilst, on the other, the defenders of orthodoxy have been driven to seek for weapons in the armoury of the Vatican, and the dusty archives of the middle ages. In the battle of the "Oxford Tracts," the evangelical party, but little distinguished by talents or learning, have signally triumphed over adversaries deficient in neither; and high character and sound erudition have given way before the more popular liberality of their opponents. The historical foundations of the Church have been found unable to bear the superstructure, and her nakedness has been ungratefully uncovered by those who still continue to minister at her altars, and to eat her bread!

The attempt, not yet I believe abandoned, to establish an "Evangelical alliance," which received the qualified approbation of Dr. Chalmers and of a considerable portion of the established clergy, affords a striking proof of the increasing laxity of religious bonds, and of the disturbing elements at work within the Church. It is easy to discover, indeed, in the proposed heterogeneous assemblage, those conflicting and irreconcileable elements of opinion which will insure its speedy dissolution; and the reports of its proceedings display such a melancholy picture of intolerance, of quackery, and fanaticism, that it is hardly deserving of a passing notice, except as illustrating the prevailing tendencies of the

time. A rationalizing spirit has penetrated into the very sanctuary of fanaticism, and bigotry itself is seeking for the practical and essential in religion, regardless of external forms, and the strictness of a doctrinal terminology. A great many instances of this rationalizing tendency have been exhibited in "Evangelical Christendom." Not long ago, the appointment of Dr. Sträuss, the author of the "Life of Jesus," and the great apostle of the rational theology in Germany, to (I believe) an ecclesiastical office, was made, without alarming the evangelical piety of Geneva; and it was only on the appointment having excited the wonder of Europe, and the sneers of the press, that the step was retraced. Alas! where is the fierce and rugged orthodoxy of our forefathers, who put their foot upon heresy as soon as it was born, and trod the life out of it, as men destroy a viper in their path!

But the evidences of religious anarchy, or reformation, (whichever we may deem it,) are not to be sought for within the pale of the Establishment alone. In stating the grand and simple doctrines, as they are called, of revealed religion, every religious teacher, of every denomination, is obliged to modify them, more or less, as the age advances in intelligence by philosophical refinements. Indeed, the history of religion in England since the Reformation is a record of progressive adaptations of its dogmatical teaching to the increasing intelligence of the laity. The mind of Newton, trained to the exercise of calm, accurate, and passionless thought, appears

naturally to have inclined to the more simple and rational theology of the Unitarians*; and the thoughtful and profound intellect of Locke (the tutor of Shaftesbury,) is found struggling for the "*reasonableness* of Christianity." In a primitive and ignorant age, the doctrine of original sin may be taught in its dogmatical simplicity, and the sins and sorrows of mankind explained by the literal offence of our first parents. The most fantastic fables of an Eastern imagination may be *literally* embodied in the popular creed, and oriental exaggerations and hyperboles be made the basis of articles of faith. As education is diffused, this mode of teaching becomes daily more impracticable, and, as a consequence, refinements, explanations, and compromises are the order of the day amongst religious parties. From the most opposite sides of the arena of controversy, we have beheld Dr. Carpenter, the Coryphæus of Unitarianism, and Mr. Penrose, the Bampton lecturer of Oxford, stepping forth to compromise their differences on the great doctrine of the atonement! the principal characteristic of the two writers being, as noticed by their reviewer, "the predominance of an ethical and practical tendency in the reasonings of the Churchman, and a very strong expression of a devotional spirit in the views of the Unitarian.

* There can be no doubt of the Unitarian tendencies of Newton, both from the testimony of Mr. Hopton Haynes, his intimate friend, and from his own writings.

To the conclusions of both writers," continues the reviewer, "to their conception of the Divine character and government—to their estimate of the terms of man's final acceptance with God, and of the great design and practical effect of the Christian dispensation, we yield our entire and most cordial assent!" So great, indeed, is the latitude demanded for a free religious expression, at the present time, that even the liberal theology of the Unitarians themselves is found to be too dogmatical for the spirit of the age*.

The questions that have been raised by the writings of Dr. Hampden, more especially in the "Bampton lectures," are far more important than is generally supposed, in their bearing, both on the doctrinal system and external government of the Church. Though, perhaps, there is little novelty in the leading idea of these writings, for a distinction was assumed by Athanasius between "scriptural" and "scholastic" theology, as early as the fourth century, and Calvin, as Dr. Chalmers† tells us, was even anxious that the word "Trinity" itself should be expunged (as being merely "scholastic") from the formularies of the Church; yet it cannot be denied, that to repudiate altogether, or sensibly to disparage, the scholastic terms in which the doctrines of the Church have been hitherto embodied, is virtually to annul its *authoritative* teaching. A

* See an account of a late schism amongst the Unitarians in the third number of the "Prospective Review."

† See pamphlet on "Evangelical Alliance."

Church without articles, or with articles without authority, is no Church in the popular acceptation of the word; and a general appeal to the Bible would but re-create the scholastic refinements it may be supposed to supersede. It has been asserted by Emerson* that the popular Christianity is founded rather on the oriental tropes and hyperboles than on the actual meaning of the scriptures, and this bold assertion may possibly find favour with an inquiring laity, abandoned by their spiritual guides to a free criticism of the language of the Gospels. If the Church has not yet found synonyms for the dogmas of the scriptures, she has signally failed in her didactic character; and if she has really achieved this delicate task, how ungracious is the discussion raised by the Bampton lecturer!

The philosophy of the question at issue between those who contend for the authority of the Church in matters of faith, and those who assert the right of private judgment, is simple and obvious. The advocates of authority assume, and justly, that the mass of mankind are in a state of pupilage—that the faith of the multitude depends upon instruction—that the history and evidences of their religion are taken upon trust—that they believe, and must long continue to believe, *in the Church*, and freely admit their own inability to judge either of the facts or the doctrines of the scriptures. Such, the advocates of authority believe, must be for ages the

* See "Orations," &c.

condition of the vulgar, and thus will Popery continue, with unimportant modifications, and under various designations, to be the religion of the ignorant in all times. The asserters of the right of private judgment, on the other hand, contend, that the nonage of mankind is fast drawing to an end, that men are rapidly becoming more thoughtful and inquisitive about their spiritual concerns, and that their aspirations should be fostered and encouraged, as the best means of elevating them in the religious scale, and as one step towards converting the world into one spiritual and Christian republic. The dispute between the two parties is, in fact, founded on their different estimate of the actual and necessary condition of the mass of mankind—the one believing in their indefinite, and even perpetual, inferiority, and their consequent mental subjection to the authority of their teachers, as a part of the Divine economy; the other recognising the law of progress—the moral and intellectual equality of all men, and their equal rights to all the privileges of the Christian commonwealth. The politics of the world—the strife of classes—the Whiggery and Toryism of all times, are, in short, exactly represented by these contests of religious sects. These are the two simple ideas at issue in the contest, though often confused by the want of clearness, or of honesty, in their clerical advocates.

The points of resemblance between the Churches of England and of Rome, so invidiously insisted on by Dissenters, and so treacherously conceded by

"evangelical" Churchmen, are found or imagined, both in the doctrine and discipline of the two Churches. It cannot be denied, that authority in matters of faith is assumed by both, to an extent inconsistent with the full exercise of the right of private judgment; the distinguishing feature of the English Church being the feebleness with which she now vindicates, in practice, her daily more unpopular theory. As long as the English Churchman continues to derive his theology from the miscellaneous and conflicting religious literature of the Reformation, he will be open to the charge of giving an "uncertain sound" in his articles and confessions of faith. There is absolutely no variety of modern religious opinion, in any degree worthy of notice, that may not claim the patronage, of some one or other of the Fathers of the Reformation. The religious radicalism of Wicliffe * furnishes the plausible ground for every form and variety of dissent, and the martyred Hooper "stumbling at the surplice" is a glorious testimony against the heterodox linen-drapery of the Tractarians.

Whether the worthies of the Reformation deserved the character of "time-serving and halting prelates" so sternly bestowed upon them by Milton, or not, it is impossible to deny that they left both the doctrine and discipline of the Church in a state of the utmost confusion. Not long ago, the Dean and Chapter of Hereford were placed on the horns of a dilemma,

* See Blunt's "Sketch of the Reformation," page 87.

which sprung directly from this "halting" policy of the Reformation, and were constrained either to accept, on the nomination of the Crown, of an heretical bishop, or incur the penalties of a præmunire.

In doctrinal matters the "uncertain sound" of the Reformation is still more fatal to the peace of the Church. We smile at the pious credulity of our forefathers, when we read in the preamble to the articles of religion, that they were drawn up to prevent the diversities of religious opinion. From the period of their publication dissent has rapidly increased, and they have been actually appealed to as supporting almost every variety of conflicting opinion; and after the revolution of three centuries we have an Established Church, in which nothing is really established—its relations to the state being entirely undefined, and its doctrinal teaching still the subject of endless controversy within the pale of her communion. The divisions of Protestants, in fact, furnish the only remaining source of power, or influence, to the Romish Church, who may fondly hope to gather into her fold the dispersed flock of the Reformation, which has been hitherto left "to stumble on dark mountains," untended and unreclaimed.

It must, indeed, be confessed, that by admitting the right of private judgment our reformers removed the keystone of the visible Church, and by submitting the Bible to the unauthorized investigation of reason, destroyed the only remaining source of so-called religious unity and spiritual dominion. To

present believers, with a body of theology as a test of orthodoxy, and still to allow dissentients a place in her communion, betrays in the Church of England, at once, the arrogance of Popery and the liberalism of Dissent, and such, undoubtedly, may be said of a Church that shelters in her bosom, at the same time, a Pusey and a Hampden, a Stowell and a Hare.

The history of the well-known "Oriel school" of theology is a pregnant instance of the fatal facility with which men pass, from even the lawful exercise of their reason, into the paths of heresy; and explains, if it does not justify, the assertion of the Romanist that Protestantism is the parent of infidelity. A few years ago, the common room at Oriel was the constant scene of those gladiatorial displays of intellect which the liberal Protestantism of the age has introduced into the arena of theological discussion. Amongst the most distinguished of the combatants were Blanco White, Newman, Arnold, Whateley, and Hampden, men admitted even by their adversaries to have possessed considerable learning, unblemished character, and religious sincerity. The dust of the amphitheatre has now cleared away, and after the lapse of a few years let us again observe the position of the combatants. The simple-minded, sensitive, and honest Blanco White, after having successively attached himself, after his secession from Romanism, to the liberal Church party, to the Evangelicals, and to the Unitarians, at length died in the profession of what the world

calls Deism. The devout and reverential Newman, after a long and painful struggle, being unable to find a resting-place for the sole of his feet, within the pale of his Church, in primitive simplicity of heart commences, staff in hand, a pilgrimage to Rome! Such are the extremes to which a liberal Protestantism has conducted two of its most accomplished and earnest disciples. The intervening ground is filled up with other varieties of religious opinion, emanating from the same school of liberal theology. The latitudinarian opinions of Arnold are well known. Whateley, though an archbishop, has been called a Sabellian. Hampden is a condemned heretic, though an English bishop. The archbishop of Dublin entertained in his household the Deist White, as the tutor of his children; and after White had retired uncensured from his office, allowed him a pension up to the time of his death. It may be said, perhaps, that the archbishop might be ignorant of the religious character of the mind to which he entrusted the education of his children, but this is a poor compliment to the penetration of that clear-minded and long-sighted prelate. The transparent sincerity of White furnished a thread of "psychological identity," throughout the whole of his career, that could not possibly have escaped the observation of so careful an analyst of character as the logical reformer of Oriel—who must have seen, from the first, that the truth-seeking seceder from Romanism was not likely to repose quietly on the authoritative teaching of the English Church. The probability

of the archbishop's having been early acquainted with the general tendency of the opinions of White, is greatly increased by the observation in the last letter written by White to Dr. Channing, in which he says, in speaking of his doubts of revelation, "*That* subject was the occasion of my *first* anxiety and *disappointment* on joining the Church of England!"

With regard to Dr. Hampden, it has been openly asserted, and but very feebly denied, that Blanco White was the Gamaliel at whose feet he imbibed the opinions, in reference to the scholastic theology, which were condemned by the university of Oxford.

Such, then, was the "Oriel school" of liberal theology, which has furnished, from amongst its most distinguished members, representatives of almost every possible shade of religious opinion, from naked Popery to pure Deism; and whose history and fortunes will suggest to reflecting minds the constantly-evaded question, whether it be possible to reconcile the rights of reason with *any* form of Church authority; or to establish any peculiar form of Christianity without assuming the Divine and infallible authority of its teachers? The liberal Protestant perpetually evades or mystifies the question. The Church of Rome, by sound and formal logic, but from vicious premises, supports a spiritual despotism and a corrupt creed; whilst the English Church, by asserting the right of private judgment, whilst she restrains its expression by articles of faith and ecclesiastical censures, is vainly endeavour-

ing to reconcile, by false reasoning and illiberal sophistry, the tyranny of Rome with the freedom of the conventicle.

The appearance of the author of "Ancient Christianity" (to whom I have before briefly alluded), in the character of a Protestant advocate, deserves more than a passing notice, whilst we are discussing the existing condition of the Church. I am afraid this ingenious writer has not counted the cost of turning the eyes of profane learning and philosophical inquiry upon the consecrated records of his Church. The party to which he belongs, (and of whose views he is one of the ablest advocates,) whilst they do not reject the aid of philosophy and learning, in expounding the mysteries and investigating the history of their religion, are little prepared for the legitimate consequences; and they vainly imagine, that whilst men are taught to reason like philosophers, they will still continue to believe like Churchmen. The Papist, who believes that a wafer is changed into a God, and the Protestant, who contends that a God is "verily and indeed" present in a wafer, will receive much the same treatment at the hands of the philosopher, who will smile with equal incredulity at the "inspiration" claimed for the scriptures, and the "authority" assumed by the Church. The philosopher will be apt to regard as an equal idolatry the worship of the "Son" and the "Mother of God."

In attacking the doctrinal system of the Church, and exposing the well-known *Platonism* of the

Christian Fathers, he seems entirely to forget that the same criticism may be, and in fact has been, freely applied to the Gospel of John and the Epistles of Paul: nay, some "wild thinkers" may possibly be found to assert the probability that Christ himself may have been educated (whilst "obedient to his parents") in the Platonic philosophy, which extensively leavened the age in which he lived. In the writings and practices of the Nicene Fathers*, against which he principally protests, there is no doubt a strong leaven of asceticism; but the most delicate criticism is not always successful in distinguishing it from the self-denying precepts of the Gospel. The learned Le Clerc, it is well known, after a long life of critical inquiry, was strongly disposed to concede the *identity* of Platonism and Christianity; and a learned Frenchman (M. Dacier, himself a believer in the Christian revelation) has freely confessed, that every ethical precept and vital doctrine of the scriptures (excepting the atonement,) are to be found in the "Divine Dialogues."

The single-hearted Gilbert Wakefield, of whom it was truly said, that he united "to the profound genius of a philosopher the simplicity of a child," indulging in the free criticism of the patristic

* Mr. Isaac Taylor is certainly mistaken, in supposing that the Protestant Reformation was based on a return to the scriptures exclusively, and not to the patristic theology. Erasmus, speaking generally of the work of Luther, says, "*he has set men upon studying the Fathers.*" See Middleton's Life of Luther, page 32.

writings, to which we are invited by the author of the "Ancient Christianity," has pronounced the Trinitarian doctrine "a preposterous accommodation of evangelical truth to the mysteries of Gentile philosophy."* Liberal critics, it appears, arrive at very different conclusions from the premises so frankly presented by the evangelical champion, and it has cost them but little labour to trace even the great doctrine of the Trinity to the philosophy of Plato.

I believe, indeed, generally, that the Platonism, the Gnosticism, the Buddhism, the Soofeeism of all history, may be, in fact, considered as one system modified at different times by external circumstances. The Protean heresy, our author confesses, was "scarcely less ancient than the patriarchal piety," and is not less modern than the Oxford divinity. It appears, then, to have been a necessary element in the spiritual history of the species, at all periods and in all countries. In the abstract Gnosticism of Philo, he allows "the brighter and purer element appeared on the surface," as contrasted with the darker heresy of Manes; and he asserts its unconfessed but extensive and permanent influence on "Ancient Christianity." No doubt this Gnosticism had a great variety of sects, (Gibbon says there were 50,) the fruit of the wide rationalism it encouraged. In some of its phases it was little more than the protest of reason against the carnal and impossible

* See "Wakefield on Matthew," page 7 (quarto edit.).

attributes with which vulgar superstition had invested the Divine Nature; whilst in others it may have assumed a more tangible and corrupt form, as a system of religious philosophy. It is, however, worthy of remark, that Gibbon has accused the Christian Fathers of calumniating the Gnostics, whose doctrines they are thus said to have embraced.

On the whole, it should excite but little surprise, that the Christian Fathers (skilled as they were in the learning of their age) should present in their writings the common impress of the cognate systems of Christ and Plato; and that three of them, at least *, unable to distinguish, where there was apparently no difference, should fall into the very natural error of asserting the "*inspiration*" of the Greek philosopher. St. Augustin has frankly declared, that it was by the light of the Platonic philosophy that he was enabled to penetrate the mysteries of the Trinity; and the modern Trinitarian can hardly complain of the means adopted by the learned Father to achieve so difficult and so delicate a task.

It may, perhaps, a little startle the credulous and superficial laity that crowd the churches of "evangelical" preachers, to assert that a strong taint of rationalism is discoverable, as I before observed, in the religious philosophy they inculcate. There is something vague, and indefinite, and somewhat dan-

* Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Athenagoras. See M. Dacier's Introduction to the "Divine Dialogues."

gerous, in regard to establishments, in the Protestantism of a liberal Churchman. Our author declares, that up to the present time "our English Protestantism is weak, and vulnerable on every side," and then he somewhat paradoxically asserts that this is peculiarly the time for submitting it to a terrible operation—the excision of a cancer which has deeply tainted its blood.

In reference to the external government of the Church, it is easy to discover, in "Ancient Christianity," the same halting inconsistency, that leaves the writer for ever suspended between the humble obedience of Faith and the free assumptions of Philosophy. In the estimate which is formed of the spirit of the Protestant Reformation, there is the same logical inconsistency and confusion. If the Reformers really asserted (as it is contended for) the absolute right of private judgment, they must entirely have overlooked the legitimate consequences of their concession. From the first outbreak of the Reformation to the present time, our history is illustrated by a series of struggles for the extension of this principle to its legitimate length. The stream has been occasionally dammed up, indeed, by a feeble, and daily decreasing, party, but nothing has been able, hitherto, permanently to arrest its progress. An archbishop in the person of Laud, and a king in that of Charles the First, were overwhelmed by the torrent, which spared neither the mitre nor the crown. The writings of Bacon and Locke, and others of their school, were constantly

cast like seeds upon the subsiding waters, destined to bring forth their fruit "after many days;" and these still continue to germinate from day to day. But what was the real intention of our Protestant Reformers? Was the Reformation merely a crude attempt to reform the Christian Church on the principles of Philosophy, and did the Reformers intend absolutely to free us from the restraints of ecclesiastical authority? I admit that it is difficult to answer the question I am proposing. The *no-principle-principle* of the Reformation is evident from the various and conflicting opinions attributed to the Reformers, on almost every subject on which they attempted to dogmatize, and which have left as wide a field for controversy as the most profound mysteries of religion itself. A reformation, based on the system of Wickliffe, would have been a pure religious democracy; but there is some hope for establishments in the courtly accommodations of Cranmer. In the present age, the polished and sophistical learning of Chalmers affords but a feeble resistance to the strong common sense, and nervous eloquence, of Wardlaw; and, as the discussion becomes more popular, (the philosopher will tell us,) it will become more rational. Professional mystery, and a technical phraseology, will no longer conceal from the people a plain and simple question, and our author, and the halting party to which he belongs, must honestly choose between contending principles.

I repeat, there are but two parties in the religious

world, in reference to the external government of the Church — the advocates of *reason* and of *authority*. And I ask, to which of these parties does the liberal evangelical Churchman profess to belong * ? It is a question of degree, rather than of principle, whether he subscribes to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, or to the dogmas of the Nicene or Romish theology.

In tracing, as he professes to do, the discipline and economy of the Church to their purest and earliest sources, our author must have made, one would suppose, some discoveries (as a philosopher,) calculated to shake his faith as a Church-of-England Episcopalian. Whilst eschewing, in words, the democratic spirit in religion, he must surely be aware that, at the period to which he refers us for his ideal establishment, the Church was essentially a democracy, and that this was probably one cause of its early persecution.

Episcopacy, in any sense analogous to the modern, did not exist, and, long after its introduction into the Church, the episcopal office was the subject of popular election†. If, therefore, he is disposed

* Dr. Hampden, whose cause has been warmly advocated by the evangelical clergy, teaches us that the terms "mediator," "advocate," "intercessor," "justification," "remission," "pardon," &c., &c., were borrowed by the schoolmen from the courts of law. But from whom did the *inspired* writers borrow them? And what will become of the evangelical orator, if he is no longer to round his periods with these consecrated phrases? See Bampton Lectures, Lect. V. p. 242.

† See King's "Primitive Church." Cyprian is said, by his deacon

to fall back upon these simple times for his ideal establishment, he was far better off in the camp of the Dissenters, from which he is a deserter, than within the pale of the National Church.

In his definition of a Christian Church*, though he conceals his speculations under the specious appearance of expounding a prophetical parable, it is easy to discover the lurking spirit of liberalism. He denies that God's help is, in any special manner, vouchsafed to associated bodies of believers, (as such,) and thus leaves a Church teaching vital truth, and one inculcating vital error, in the same unauthorized position. He acknowledges, at one moment, the doctrine of a particular providence, and, the next, denies its application to the most interesting of human concerns. His mind, in fact, appears alternately to expand under the principles of philosophy, and to contract under the influence of religious partizanship.

It may amuse a vacant hour, for the learned and accomplished believer to deduce, from the critical examination of an obscure parable, the fortunes, past, present, and future, of the Christian Church, and ingeniously to twist its mysterious language into conformity with his peculiar views of the Divine economy. An endless amount of unhallowed criticism on the providence of God has thus been produced; but such a learned religion as this was

Pontius, to have been elected to the Bishopric of Carthage "by the grace of God and the *favour of the people*." See Cyprian, Epistle 28.

* See "Ancient Christianity," vol. i. page 431.

never intended for the mass of mankind. The unlettered laity, even of the 19th century, require a Church more *visible*, or a Philosophy more *intelligible*, than this. We are taught, by ecclesiastical history, that, as soon as the Church assumed the character of an organized body, the "loose wanderings of the imagination were gradually confined by creeds and confessions;"* and it has been the natural policy of the Church, in all subsequent times, to establish an authority in the corporate body, that should control, in matters of faith, the individual member. It is, as I have before observed, a most miserable sophistry, to attempt to reconcile the right of private judgment with the existence of these restraints; and the liberal Churchman, who strives to unite these conflicting dogmas, is at once a bad logician and a bad Churchman. Arguments, compounded of the antagonist principles of Dr. Wardlaw, the honest and open enemy of establishments, on the one hand, and of Dr. Wiseman on the other, will not long continue to deceive even the frequenters of our fashionable chapels.

Whether (as some men think) the days of establishments are already numbered, or whether there be in the human mind (as all history, at least, seems to teach,) a natural bias towards the principle they embody—whether mankind is to remain, for an indefinite period longer, in a state of religious pupilage, or is even now verging towards its man-

* See Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," &c., chap. xxi.

hood—a great *change*, of some sort, is undoubtedly hanging over our heads. The great moral power given to the people, by the invention of printing, and the diffusion of knowledge, seems now, for the first time since the Reformation, to be universally felt in its influence on the fortunes of the Church. Millions who, scarce a century ago, were superstitious, ignorant, and obedient, are now become curious, enlightened, and disputatious. In the trading districts of the country—the scene of Athenæums, Mechanics' Institutes, and Debating Clubs—a population, once an inert mass, has become a living soul. Noble lords, and learned professors, delight in expatiating before toil-worn listeners*, on the glories, the powers, and the privileges of knowledge; and, however crudely these younger children of science may occasionally develope their thoughts, they are still *learning to think*, and by doing so they change and modify, if they do not altogether destroy, their ancient relations with the Church.

Now, I am not about to impeach the soundness of the reasoning of liberal Churchmen, but their consistency as members of the Established Church. I have said that the earliest form of Christianity was essentially *democratic*, and that this was one cause both of its rapid success and of much of the persecution it encountered. The condition of women and slaves, in the Roman empire, will account for the easy conversion of a large proportion of the

* See Annual Reports of the proceedings of the Manchester Athenæum.

heathen world, as these social pariahs were invited, by the mild and equalizing spirit of the new Faith, to take their proper and natural place in the human family. In our own times, the emancipation of slaves, and the elevation of women in the social scale, is considered as the peculiar triumph of Christian philanthropy. If we may believe Gibbon*, the early Christian preachers had a strong leaven of democracy, and the eloquence of the Fathers was essentially popular—many of them having been expressly educated for forensic display. The eloquence of the tribune, he tells us, which had been suppressed under the empire, was revived in the pulpits of the Christian Churches.

The Christian religion, then, first dogmatically taught the universal equality of mankind in the sight of God, and, though it appended to the doctrine the precept of obedience to constituted authority, it is natural to suppose that, amongst a barbarous and oppressed multitude, the first would be well remembered, whilst the last was often forgotten. The Christian religion was, in fact, a charter of freedom to the human race, and, though it did not immediately announce the *civil* equality of mankind, it was easy to perceive that this, though the remote, must be the certain effect of its general diffusion†.

* "Decline and Fall," chap. xx.

† The illustrious Luther had but little respect for the civil power, and not only assailed with the most virulent language the most powerful monarch in Europe, but had generally, in the language of

In modern times, indeed, the political oppressor is commonly assailed with weapons taken from the Christian armoury, and the civil rights of mankind are, usually, weighed in the "balance of the sanctuary." In the revolutions of almost every country, we find the doctrines of religious equality the moving principle of every struggle for political freedom. The English puritans, who murdered Charles the First, undoubtedly founded their justification as much on the precepts of the Gospel as upon the dogmas of political expediency; nay, some of the wildest anarchists of the revolution, still going on in France, have appealed to the equalizing and democratic spirit of the Gospel*; and Rousseau in the last century, when desirous of assailing the civil institutions of his country, took his stand upon the elementary principles of Christianity†.

The "signs of the times," at the present moment, sufficiently prove that the democratic spirit is still a powerful element in the popular Christianity, in reference to the external government of the Church, and this is the time selected by the "liberal" portion

his biographer, "a very unfavourable opinion of sovereign princes." See Middleton's Life, page 23.

* See Louis Blanc's "Organization of Labour," page 1 (Introduction).

† Rambaldi, a distinguished Roman Radical, speaking from the pedestal of the statue of Marcus Aurelius, thus addressed the populace of Rome: "I am a priest of Christ, and it is with the deepest conviction I call you from the top of the Capitol to liberty and independence, because the principle of your right lives eternally in the Gospel." See "Times" newspaper, Jan. 15, 1849.

of her defenders for tampering with the vital principles on which she is founded. Professing themselves entirely satisfied with the figure, they have become most curiously critical about the drapery. A great principle is at issue between the Church and the people, and Churchmen are engaged in a petty squabble about albs and surplices! An overwhelming enemy is thundering at the gate, and the garrison are discussing the colour of their uniform! The Church is loudly called upon, by the appearances around her, to gird up her loins, strengthen her bulwarks, and review her forces: and this is the time chosen by one of her "soi-disant" liberal defenders to enlighten the laity on the horrors of "priestcraft."* At this moment the "Penny Pulpit" is teeming with the *joint* labours of Dissenters and Evangelical clergymen, who meet on the same platforms, and support the same religious societies; the one believing (or at least *professing* to believe) the Church of England to be "par excellence" the Church of Christ, whilst the other openly brands it as a "rag of Popery!"

Thus is the Church assailed by a religious rabble, composed of every section of almost every religious party. In this motley gathering Mr. Francis Close and Dr. Wardlaw are "met together," and Mr. Baptist Noel† and the Scotch philosophers have "kissed each

* Mr. Close, of Cheltenham, not long ago published a sermon on this popular subject.

† Since the above was written, this gentleman has had the honesty to secede from the Church.

other." "Ancient Christianity" is folded in the embraces of the "Edinburgh Reviewers," who, for the nonce, have formed a "Holy Alliance" with Exeter Hall. The word "laity" has taken place of the word "people" in the rounded periods of the popular newspapers. A white surplice has become a more fearful object to the multitude than the "san benito" of the Inquisition. For wearing the hated vestment in his pulpit, a clergyman of Exeter was, not long ago, hooted from his pulpit, by a mob of reformers, applauded, if not backed, by a reporter of the "first journal in Europe."

Bishops have been bullied by churchwardens in bad grammar, and an honest London clergyman accused of purloining the sacramental alms of the people. Sunday journals discourse theology, and penny-a-liners pour contempt on the pastoral letters of archbishops of Canterbury*. Indignant vestries, adjourning to alehouses, threaten to cut off the supplies, by refusing the rates; and the organ is becoming mute, and the lights are being extinguished in our metropolitan churches, for the lack of funds. The ladies of Helston, not long ago, remained unmarried, rather than receive the Eucharist "upon compulsion," and those of Exeter "unchurched," rather than brave the indelicate publicity of the appointed office, which supposes the presence of a

* The Bishop of Exeter, on making official inquiries into the practices of some professedly Protestant "Sisters of Mercy" at Plymouth, was saluted, in the midst of his clergy, by "hisses and laughter." See "Times" newspaper, Feb. 17, 1849.

congregation. Stone altars have raised as much horror as the revival of the Inquisition; and the "Camden Society" is suspected of a deadly design of undermining the Protestant Church, by reviving a taste for ecclesiastical architecture. The "mark of the beast" is discovered in the red lines and illuminated borders of our prayer books; and, in short, the arts of printing, of painting, and architecture have conspired for the overthrow of Christian simplicity, and Protestant liberty*. "Little Bethel" is up in arms, and Great Britain frighted from its propriety. Oxford, the citadel of orthodoxy, has been torn by internal divisions, and the Evangelical party, to prevent Mr. Ward from becoming a cardinal, seemed strongly disposed to make him a martyr. The momentary lull, since the triumph of Dr. Hampden over the combined forces of bigots and fanatics, is in hourly danger of being broken, by the disorganized condition of the routed army, who are scarcely kept from turning their arms upon each other, by a secret conviction of their common danger.

The attempts that have been made to restore the vitality of the Church have been conceived in a spirit little suited to support its authoritative cha-

* These polemical contests between High and Low Churchmen are no more respectable than those of the Eastern and Western Churches in the ninth century. The questions as to the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the celebration of the Eucharist, or as to the greater orthodoxy of "vegetable oil" over "animal grease" in the keeping of Lent, are not more frivolous than the modern disputes about vestments and altars.

racter. The transfusion of voluntaryism into her system, in various secret forms, has been adopted by her liberal friends. Churches have been built without endowments, or with endowments totally insufficient; and the clergyman is thus reduced to the condition of a popular actor deriving his stipend from the sale of tickets at the door of his church. Churches have been built also by the novel expedient of "penny" subscriptions. A "Penny Pulpit" records the eloquence of the clerical orator, and the galleries of Christian churches are become the galleries of reporters.

From the present condition of the Church, which I have attempted to describe, we may, I think, fairly infer that a vital and organic change in her system, and not merely a superficial adaptation of her teaching to the spirit of the age, is imminent and certain, and that a reformation, far more extensive than has hitherto embellished her history, inevitably awaits her. Her "whole head is sick," her "whole heart is faint." Even in the "multitude of her counsellors" there is no "strength," but rather confusion, vacillation, and dismay. Neither the orthodox practitioners of Oxford, nor the empyrics of Exeter Hall (the last hope of her despairing friends), seem able to arrest the progress of her malady. In spite of a few spasmodic and convulsive throes, the effect of the transfusion of a spurious liberalism into her constitution, her days are, most assuredly, already numbered. Her precarious connection with the state, by securing her material interests, alone pre-

vents her swift destruction; and already the question of the confiscation of her property, or, at least, of the redistribution of her revenues, is temperately discussed in the councils of the nation. The monarch is no longer, as even in the last century, her "nursing mother,"—the ablest of her political supporters are become lax and lukewarm, whilst her enemies, both temporal and spiritual, are "come in like a flood." From motives the most various and conflicting, the most earnest of her ancient defenders are seceding from her communion; and, whilst she is too strait for the evangelical liberality of Mr. Baptist Noel, she is too lax for the orthodoxy of Newman, of Oakley, and of Ward. It is impossible to deny, moreover, that the Church is, in many respects, in direct antagonism to the spirit of our civil and political institutions. In the "Homily on Rebellion," for instance, she utterly repudiates the principle of the Revolution. According to the homily, the Christian is equally bound to obey a good and a bad prince, (the latter being imposed upon us for the punishment of our sins,) and rebellion against God's anointed, and resistance to any oppression, however intolerable, are regarded as deadly sins. Thus, by a fanatical perversion of a Gospel precept, the timid tactics, and cautious wisdom, of a nascent sect are still retained in a Divine philosophy that has already civilized a vast proportion of the human race. The "right divine of kings," however, has now become a piece of ridiculous bombast, though they still continue nomi-

nally to reign over us by the "grace of God." In the early spring-time of the world the king and priest were alike regarded as "God's anointed," and were probably distinguished for their spiritual pre-eminence, if not for any superhuman endowments. The "kings of the earth" are already fallen or falling from their high estate, and everywhere under different names assuming the character of political forms. The priest must soon follow in the wake of the king; for, both having lost their original relations to the people over whom they exercised their *spiritual* authority, the king is degraded to the president, and the priest into the schoolmaster.

It cannot, however, be denied, that the decline both of the kingly and priestly office, historically regarded, has not been altogether a regular and progressive one. A real king, or priest, occurring here and there, in the waste of centuries, has occasionally sustained the dignity, and arrested the downfal, of his office. France has had her St. Louis, and England her Alfred, and even the chair of St. Peter has, at times, been filled by a true prophet. Nay, in modern times, the sceptre is not always wielded by a feeble hand, nor do the priestly robes always cover either the hypocrite, the fanatic, or the formalist. It may be fairly argued, that these manifestations of the Divine power, bestowed upon the master-minds of different ages, enabling them to raise and bless mankind, are proofs that our political and religious forms were *originally* in conformity with the laws of nature; and that these forms may still be made

capable, by a searching reformation, of carrying on the spiritual affairs of the world. Equality, indeed, intellectual, moral, or political, (any further than that the last supposes equality in the eye of the laws by which men have agreed to be governed,) is one of the wildest dreams of a morbid enthusiasm; but the law of God, still, sanctions only the *spiritual* authority of man over man. There is no principle in human nature more evident than its acknowledgment of this spiritual pre-eminence *. It is the foundation of discipleship, in every political party, in every philosophical school, and in every religious sect. It is this, alone, that really crowds the lecture-room and the chapel, and inspires with loyalty and love the subjects of virtuous and able princes. The meanness of envy, and even the pangs of poverty, are rendered nugatory, with the multitude, by the splendour of talent, and the charm of virtue, in those that govern them.

Out of such elements as these it is surely possible to reconstruct (though not to save) the falling fabrics of monarchies, of aristocracies, and of priesthoods; but bigotry still continues to contend against the principle, and timidity to distrust the means, of regeneration. But let it not be supposed that great and vital changes, in the religious and civil institutions of nations, can only be effected by revolutionary violence. The mere moral force of opinion, in

* The most primitive idea of a king was the "*union of intellect and physical force*," typified in the form of the Egyptian Sphinx. See "The Crescent and the Cross," vol. ii. page 7.

modern times, is daily achieving triumphs of principle, for which our forefathers died on the scaffold, and at the stake, and often died in vain. The attitude of the modern reformer should be one of perpetual protest against all that is false, unreal, and corrupt—looking to the secret influences of time and knowledge for the triumph of the right.

To bring the spiritual government of the world into sounder and more consistent relations with the existing intelligence of the age, it will be necessary, at least, to modify so much of the doctrinal teaching and external government of all Christian Churches as is involved in the assertion of the following dogmas of the popular theology, viz. :—

1. Of the vague and indefinite doctrine of the "*inspiration of the Scriptures.*"
2. Of the doctrine of Miracles and Prophecy.
3. Of the really Pagan doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, as now taught.
4. Of the futile and fallacious idea of teaching Christianity by dogmatical Creeds and Articles.

Such must be the basis of any really spiritual Reformation, and the foundation of any truly Catholic Christianity. The time for such a purification of our temples may not yet have actually arrived, but the *tendencies* of the age are clear and explicit, though veiled in the disguise of a mock-religious phraseology. These subjects I propose to discuss in the following pages, and I shall endeavour to

demonstrate their connection with the corruption and degradation of Christianity. I have purposely abstained from any notice of the doctrine of the Trinity, because, in the present temper of the world, I believe it would be impossible to excite the feeblest interest in such a discussion, beyond the cloisters of our Universities, and because I am unwilling to rekindle the ashes of an expiring superstition. The creed of Athanasius is gradually disappearing, even from its last hold, in the formularies of the Church, and we may venture to predict that the doctrine will not long survive the destruction of its foundations*.

* The latest religious philosophy on the subject of the Trinity will be found in Dr. Hampden's Bampton Lectures, Lect. III., which shows how little is to be done, by learning, talent, and sincerity, for this most intractable subject.

CHAPTER II.

INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

"Our inspiration lies in the impulse of a good conscience, and the light of a sound understanding. We do not pretend to bring you a new revelation, but confine ourselves to that which hath been given you, and which you no longer understand."—Rousseau's "Letters written from the Mountains," page 59.

In examining the relations of revelation with the philosophy and science of the nineteenth century, it is necessary to inquire into, and compare, the popular and philosophical ideas of the inspiration of the Scriptures. In doing this, the first difficulty we encounter arises from the looseness of the terms in which the former is commonly defined. The doctrine of "plenary inspiration" in its widest sense, is, I presume, *nominally* abandoned by all rational and educated believers, and yet even a "verbal and literal" inspiration appears still, in some sense, to be insisted on by the great mass of the orthodox learned*; in spite of the admitted difficulty of

* Heinfetter actually contends that all the supposed discrepancies to be found in the Christian Scriptures arise from our "ignorance of the Greek language!" See Introduction to "Πνευμα."

ascertaining, in many cases, the actual meaning of the writings themselves, and of settling the question of authority between contending versions *.

A *literal* acceptation of the language of Scripture would, in many cases, involve the most palpable contradictions on points of vital importance. "I and the Father are one," and "the Father is greater than I," cannot be literally interpreted without a contradiction in terms. "Peace I leave with you," and "I come *not* to send peace but a sword," are texts that must be qualified before they can be reconciled with each other. A still more startling contradiction exists between those passages of the Gospels which *appear* to assert that the miracles were wrought for the conversion of unbelievers, and those which distinctly state that the miracles were *not* performed "because of their unbelief."

We can only attribute to this logical inconsistency the perverse determination exhibited by believers in written revelations, in opposing the purification of the sacred text, even from grammatical errors and involved constructions. It is somewhat singular, also, to find that party in the Church, who are most jealous of the slightest interference

* I am bound to exonerate Dr. Hampden from this charge, for, after quoting the *words* of an Apostle, he remarks, "they were probably borrowed from the Platonic philosophy." See Bampton Lectures, Lect. III., page 111. Dr. Chalmers, on the other hand, boldly asserts, that "the Scriptures contain God's own truth in God's own *language*." See pamphlet on "Evangelical Alliance," page 11.

with the letter of the Scriptures, distinguished, at the same time, by a somewhat lax adherence to the authority of the Church, by which, alone, they had been preserved to them in their present form.

I presume the popular notion of inspiration is founded on the assumption, that God was pleased, at various times and in different ages, through the instrumentality of seers and prophets, and, lastly, by the manifestation of himself in the flesh, to give to all mankind a revelation of his Will, conveyed in the Hebrew and Greek tongues; and, though eighteen centuries of criticism and persecution have been insufficient either to explain the meaning of the writings, or to extinguish heresy, that the sacred volume, as a whole, still retains its mystical authority over the human race; as much as if, in its present form and language, it had fallen down from heaven.

Instead, however, of speculating on the popular idea of inspiration, we will assume as orthodox the definition afforded us by an able Biblical critic, whose writings are used as a text book in our learned universities. The Rev. Hartwell Horne, in his "Introduction to a critical study of the Scriptures," (alas! that a revelation from God to man should require a "critical study,") affords us the following definition of inspiration. He defines it to be, "the imparting of such a degree of Divine influence, assistance, or guidance, as enabled the authors of the several books of Scripture to communicate religious knowledge to others without error or mistake." We will proceed to examine this

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definition by the common rules of criticism, and see how far it will support the popular notion of inspiration, or satisfy the religious *sentiment* of believers in revelation.

In the above definition, it is asserted that the writers of the sacred volume were preserved by a Divine influence from "*error or mistake;*" but whether the learned writer would confine the meaning of these words to ethical and moral error, and to mistakes in matters of fact, the looseness of the terms leaves us no means of discovering. At any rate, but *two* suppositions can be possibly entertained as to the meaning of the definition—either it excludes "error and mistake" of every description, philosophical and ethical—"errors" in opinion and "mistakes" in matters of fact, or it is confined to errors and mistakes merely ethical.

We will examine separately these two hypotheses, beginning with that which assumes the exemption of the sacred record from *all* error, philosophical, scientific, and moral. To assent to this definition, I am afraid, would require a larger concession of the freedom of thought, and the rights of reason, than would accord with the liberal Christianity of the present age. Such a concession involves the necessity of defending the physical philosophy of the Bible against the discoveries of modern science, and drives us at once to the ground assumed by the monks of the sixteenth century, in their persecuting crusade against the philosophy of Galileo; or the

still less tenable position of the Hutchinsonians* of the last century, who confined all human knowledge to the five books of Moses, and condemned Newton as an "ignorant pretender." If this view of the definition should be taken as that of the orthodox Protestant, he is, assuredly, less "*rational*" than the Roman Catholic, who denies the "sufficiency," and, therefore, in reality, the absolute inspiration of the Scriptures†. The concessions recently made to the requisitions of geological science forbid us to suppose that any considerable number of educated Christians, of any denomination, would subscribe to so fanatical a view of the doctrine of inspiration.

Before, however, we proceed to consider the definition, as asserting the *merely ethical* inspiration of the Scriptures, we will notice, in passing, another view of inspiration which appears to occupy a kind of debateable land between the two hypotheses we are discussing. There is a class of Christians, who consider the Scriptures, not as being in themselves an actual revelation, but as containing, in some mysterious and apparently ineffable manner, a Divine communication from God to man. The minds of the sacred writers were supernaturally endowed with Divine wisdom, but they were left to communicate it by the imperfect organ of human

* See Smollett's "History of England," vol. vi., page 408.

† Tetzel maintained against Luther that there are many Catholic truths not to be found in the Scriptures. See Middleton's "Life of Luther," page 21.

language. Of this theory of inspiration, it may be observed, that it opens a vast field of vague and endless criticism, and presents a very disparaging idea of a Divine law, intended for the comfort, instruction, and guidance of mankind. A merely human law, given under such conditions, would be absolutely inoperative, or infinitely worse—would furnish a ready instrument of legal tyranny and forensic perversion. We find, therefore, (as might have been anticipated,) the defenders of this theory constantly involved in the mazes of a speculative theology, and attacking or defending, inch by inch, the barren field of Biblical criticism. By the assumption of "oriental peculiarities" of thought and language, in the sacred writers, the literal meaning of the Scriptures is left vague and uncertain. An apostle is assumed to be inspired at one moment, and not at another, (and it must be confessed that the words of St. Paul * give a very colourable excuse for the assumption,) and inspiration is denied, where the matter recorded may be proved to be erroneous as philosophy or fact. It is contended, however, that, with all these concessions, the sacred volume still contains, after the freest criticism, a residuum sufficient to establish its claim to be considered a miraculous revelation of instruction and promise. The theory before us evidently supposes that human reason is the proper test of what shall be human faith, and I believe that a considerable

* See 1 Corinthians, chap. vii. verse 6.

number of professedly orthodox Christians (their number daily increasing) acknowledge this mode of interpretation, which is openly professed by the Unitarians alone.

I cannot help noticing, in passing, the very original theory of Heinfetter, who assumes that our "*ignorance of Greek*" is the cause of all our perplexities as to the meaning of scripture. "The difficulty," naïvely observes Heinfetter*, "in ascertaining, in the present day, what it has pleased Almighty God to reveal in Holy Scripture on this subject, (that is, the subject of the Spirit,) arises principally, if *not altogether*, from man's having lost the sense conveyed by the expression, and omission of *the Greek article!*"† If this be true, the loss of the sense of the "Greek article" must be the greatest ever sustained by the human race, and a preliminary step to all vital Christianity must be a profound study of the Greek tongue. Dr. Parr ought assuredly to have been elevated to the see of Canterbury, in the last century, and our present rulers cannot do better than persist in their somewhat unpopular custom, of raising to the highest offices in the Church the editors of Greek plays and the laborious "diggers of Greek roots." Our grammar-schools should be immediately restored to their ancient footing, and, instead of being secularized into vehicles of "useful

* See "Πνευμα"—its usage and sense in Holy Scripture.

† Heinfetter, however, is not quite original, for Granville Sharp attempted to establish the divinity of Christ by the *distinctive force of the Greek article!*

knowledge," should be exclusively devoted to the study of Greek. The "Greek article," in the theory of Heinfetter, has acquired an importance far greater than belonged to the "homoöusion" or "homoiousion" in the fourth century, and the "martyrs of the diphthong" must have shed their blood about a matter comparatively insignificant.

I now proceed to inquire into the most rational supposition as to the meaning of the definition before us—the supposition that the sacred writers were merely protected by Divine influence from the inculcation of *ethical* or *moral* error.

I would first observe, that a distinction is sometimes made between *intellectual* and *moral* error, in discussing this question, which presents a somewhat degrading idea of Divine agency. The highest conception of God is that of simple and absolute truth, without any admixture of imperfection or error, and it is almost as shocking to imagine the Divine Spirit misleading the understanding, as corrupting the heart—as teaching what is false in philosophy, as what is false in morals. An intelligent apprehension of the laws of the material universe is certainly a means of elevating the soul to the contemplation of the Divine nature; and He who has made the visible world that surrounds us to minister "beauty to the sight and music to the ear," and who has implanted in our souls the desire of knowledge and the love of truth, must surely have intended us to combine the progress of the intellect with the development of the soul. On any other supposition, a knowledge of

natural science is indifferent or useless to us, and they who, like the ingenious author of the "Natural Theology,"* have attempted to lead us to God through a knowledge of his works, have been employed on a vain and unprofitable work. In fact, we must at once throw aside as worthless, the most rational as well as the most profound portion of religious literature. But natural religion is said to be the proper basis of revealed, as the former in *no way* contradicts or interferes with the latter. And yet Natural religion is founded on an intelligent knowledge of Nature, whilst "Evangelical" Christianity has ever regarded the progress of science with suspicion and dislike. Here is an equal mixture of inconsistency and fanaticism. If we are told that men passed through a fiery furnace unharmed, and that the sun stood still to enable Joshua to accomplish the destruction of his enemies, an almost equal shock is given to our belief in physics, and our ordinary ideas of the Divine government and benevolence, and our faith can only repose on the ruins of our philosophy. Modern science teaches us that the last-mentioned miracle (the staying of the sun) would have involved the destruction of the universe, and many of our orthodox commentators have been driven to the convenient expedient of resolving it

* It seems that this popular work must no longer be attributed to Paley, who appears to have been guilty of a gross literary fraud in appropriating, without acknowledgment, both its idea and most of its details from Dr. Nieuentyt's "Christian Philosopher."—See Athenæum, No. 1085.

into a "metaphor;" but still, by the almost universal consent of the clergy, the laity are permitted to remain in their superstitious belief. If such *immoral* (because *untrue*) religious philosophy is not, in fact, dogmatically taught from our pulpits, it is not because the clergy are, in general, prepared to abandon it, but because they distrust the awakened intelligence of the age. In glancing over the received commentaries on the Bible, we observe a constant attempt to balance between the rational and philosophical interpretation of these assumed miraculous events and the popular impression. But what is this but a system of deception, as gross as any that disgraced the darkest ages of the Church, or as that "esoteric" and "exoteric" mode of instruction that distinguished the theology of Paganism—involving in fact the systematic inculcation of admitted error?

But the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, according to our definition, are free from the inculcation of *moral* error. We will consider the sacred volume, then, simply in reference to its moral teaching, and its revelations on the subject of our highest spiritual concerns. A revelation of morals must, assuredly, be considered as one for perpetual observance and of universal application; and the *general moral law* embodied in the Bible, must, on the popular supposition of inspiration, be intended to define the duties and morals of mankind for all time. Now, in the present age, the great mass of the civilized world, including every religious denomination, are

vehemently protesting against the horrors of slavery, and branding it as a violation of the Divine law. But, on the supposition of the absolute sufficiency of the Scriptures, as an inspired, perpetual, and perfect moral law, this noblest enthusiasm of the age must be regarded by the believer as a spurious addition to the Divine canon. Neither the Jewish nor Christian Scriptures contain, even by implication, the slightest condemnation of the system of slavery, and in fact both the Jewish and Christian lawgiver appear to have recognised it as the normal condition of human society. In the British House of Commons, one of its most respected members, distinguished for his rigid adherence to the doctrines of his Church*, has frankly admitted that the Bible contains no precept against slavery; and it was, somewhat singularly, left for an unlearned layman to attempt a blundering apology for the sacred volume.

Except, indeed, in the acknowledgment of the Divine authority of the Decalogue, with a more liberal interpretation of its precepts—in the adoption, that is, of the moral law of his nation, with a rebuke of the narrow and literal spirit in which it was received, it can hardly be said, that in the recorded words of Christ there is any evidence of an intention to give the world a *new* system of Ethics†. The

* Sir Robert H. Inglis (1848). The sect of the *Essenes* were in this matter far more advanced than the Christians, for they strongly protested against slavery.

† "I come not to destroy the *Law*"—but to fulfil.

"new commandment" to love one another was "new" only to the exclusive spirit of Judaism. At least it must be confessed that the system which, in modern times, has been considered as purely Christian, is as old as history itself. Passing over the pure and elevated morality taught in the "Ionic" school philosophy, of which we possess but a few traditional fragments, it appears that the Grecian sages anticipated,—by at least nearly five hundred years,—*all* the moral precepts of the Gospels. The Ethics of Socrates and Plato (the latter constantly appealing in his writings to the opinions of *the ancients*) are precisely identical with those of Christ*, though it has long been received as a stereotyped and consecrated assertion, that the "forgiveness of injuries" and the "love of our enemies" are principles peculiar to Christian ethics†.

The learned M. Dacier (a devout Catholic), in his Introduction to the Divine Dialogues of Plato, affords us the following brief summary of the theology of the Academy, and I think it is impossible to deny that it sufficiently establishes the absolute identity of the Platonic and Christian ethics, as well as a most striking *doctrinal* and *theological* resemblance between the two systems.

* The learned Le Clerc was clearly of this opinion.

† See Paley's "Evidences."—This most sophistical writer speaks of the *originality* of Christian ethics, in the face of the clearest proof of their being precisely identical with those of Plato. Christ was the restorer, rather than the inventor, of the Divine ethics which bear his name.

"That there is but one God; that we ought to love and serve Him, and endeavour to resemble Him in holiness and righteousness; that this God *rewards humility and punishes pride.*"

"That the true happiness of man consists in being *united to God*, and his only misery in being *separated from Him.*"

"That the soul is mere darkness unless it be *illuminated by God;* that men are incapable even of praying well, unless God teaches them that prayer which alone can be useful to them."

"That there is nothing solid and substantial but piety; that this is the source of virtues, and that it is the *gift of God.*"

"That it is better to die than to sin."

"That we ought to be continually learning to die, and yet to endure life, in obedience to God."

"*That it is a crime to hurt our enemies*, and to revenge ourselves for the injuries we have received."

"That it is better to suffer wrong than to do it."

"That God is the sole cause of good, and *cannot be the cause of evil*, which always proceeds only from our disobedience, and the ill use we make of our liberty."

"That self-love produces that discord and division which reign among men, and is the cause of their sins; that the love of our neighbours, *which proceeds from the love of God*, as its principle, produces that sacred union which makes families, republics, and kingdoms happy."

"*That the world is nothing but corruption;* that we ought to fly from it, and to join ourselves to God, who alone is our health and life; and that while we live in this world we are surrounded by enemies, and have a *continual combat to endure,* which requires, on our part, resistance without intermission; and that we cannot conquer unless God or angels come to our help."

"That the (*Word*) Λόγος formed the world, and rendered it visible; that the knowledge of the *Word* makes us live very happily here below, and that thereby we obtain felicity after death."

"That the soul is immortal; *that the dead shall rise again; that there shall be a final judgment, both of the righteous and of the wicked, where men shall appear only with their virtues or vices, which shall be the occasion of their eternal happiness or misery.*"

Now, I repeat, that it is impossible to read the above fragments, gathered from writings at least four centuries anterior to the birth of Christ, and which are proved to have had a pervading influence on Christian theology for many centuries after that event*, without feeling more than a doubt of the *originality* of Christian ethics, and even of Christian *doctrine.* The plain assertion by Plato of the great dogma of the "immortality of the soul," of a final judgment of the just and unjust—the recognition of

* See Isaac Taylor's "Ancient Christianity;" Gibbon's "Decline and Fall;" art. "Platonism," Rees' Cyclopædia.

God as the only source of good—the view he takes of the world as "nothing but corruption," and of life as the scene of a constant preparation for death—of the being "united to God" by the elevation of our spiritual nature, and our dependence on God's help for every good gift—all these dogmas, in fact, of the Grecian sage, form the very essence of the Christian theology; and, combined with the precepts, "*not to hurt our enemies*," or to revenge our wrongs, the theology of the Academy, contrasts very favourably, at least, with the narrow and national inspirations of the *Jewish* lawgiver.

What then can it be said have the Christian Scriptures *revealed* to us, in reference to those general principles of morality and holiness which form the moral and religious code of civilized nations; and what peculiar "inspiration" was required to enunciate it, greater than the Divine spirit that filled the soul of Plato? It will perhaps be objected that the doctrine of the atonement is not found in this summary of the theology of the Academy, and that it forms a distinguishing feature in that of the Gospel. Without, however, entering into the various and conflicting views of this doctrine entertained by believers, and the shades and shadows of shades by which they have been distinguished by metaphysicians or fanatics, from Calvin to Dr. Priestley, it is enough to observe that the leading idea of them all, that of a vicarious and expiatory sacrifice for sin, is as old as the history of Religion in the world.

Dr. Priestley* denies, however, altogether that the doctrine *is* to be found either in the Jewish or Christian Scriptures, and, consequently, we must suppose that it is comparatively a modern doctrine of the *Church*. The Jews of the Gospel era had clearly no notion of a suffering but of a triumphant Messiah, and in the teaching of Christ himself there is not the slightest allusion to the modern evangelical notion of an atonement. Dr. Priestley has been followed by a modern writer† (though with a very different intention), in the assertion that the early Christian Fathers, and even those of the Apostolic age, had a very vague and imperfect, if indeed any, idea of the doctrine of atonement, which, it is asserted, is not enumerated as an article of Christian faith, in any ancient summary of the doctrines of the Church. The learning of Grotius was unable to discover any clear traces of this doctrine, earlier than the *ninth* century in the Greek Church; and in the Latin, it was not fairly established before the *eleventh*‡. The learned and devout Bishop Butler has frankly confessed that the Scriptures have not explained the mystery of the atonement, but that "it is our wisdom thankfully to accept the benefit, without

* See "History of the Corruptions of Christianity," vol. ii., page 152.

† Isaac Taylor, in his "Ancient Christianity." The mutual agreement of these two adverse writers as to the absence of the doctrine of atonement from the Patristic theology is very remarkable.

‡ See Grotii Opera, vol. iv., page 347.

disputing how it was procured."* Dr. Hampden is no doubt right in attributing the rigid definitions of the doctrine of the atonement to the spirit of scholasticism†.

To assert, then, that the writers of the New Testament were by Divine aid preserved from the inculcation of moral error is merely to place them on the same footing as the Platonic philosophers. Such in fact appears to have been the opinion of several of the Christian Fathers, more particularly of Justin Martyr, of Athenagoras, and of Clement of Alexandria. "All virtuous thoughts," says Clement, "are imparted by Divine inspiration;" and he proceeds in the form of a syllogism to argue that "therefore the Greek philosophy is from God."‡ A degree of inspiration, perfectly undefined, is generally conceded by these Fathers to the Greek philosophy, and they appear to have had no idea whatever of that peculiar and superstitious veneration for the Scriptures which Coleridge has happily distinguished as the "Bibliolatry" of modern times.§

If, indeed, there was in reality *no Bible*, properly so called, until the council of Laodicea, in the year 364, at which time the present New Testament was first received as canonical, and if, as is asserted, at

* See "Analogy," Part II., c. 5.

† See "Bampton Lectures," Lect. V., pages 245 to 257.

‡ See M. Dacier's Introduction to the "Divine Dialogues."

§ See Blanco White's Letter to Martineau, in the Appendix to the "Rationale of Religious Enquiry," page 114.

the council of Nice, in the year 325, there existed *two hundred varied versions of the adopted Evangelists, and fifty-four Gospels,* it is easy to pardon the heterodoxy of the more primitive Fathers, on the subject of "inspiration." To find the writer of a book of the Old Testament, assumed to be inspired, appealing to another inspired book for confirmation of a fact—the latter (the book of Jasher) being no longer to be found—must surely induce the rational believer of modern times to modify his idea of the doctrine of inspiration. The zeal of Ezra was unable to recover not only this "Book of Jasher," but the "Annals of the Kings," the "Book of the Wars of the Lord," a large proportion of the "Proverbs of Solomon," his "Natural History," and a thousand of his "Songs,"—all of which, consistently with the popular notion of inspiration, have an equal claim on our acceptance, at least, with the Canticles of the Son of David; in expounding which it is admitted, by an orthodox commentator, that the Fathers have often "excited ridicule or kindled the blush of shame when they intended to teach and explain the words of Divine truth."*

The spiritual power of Christianity, as contrasted with Platonism, appears in some measure to have consisted in realizing, under a more *popular* phraseology, the high philosophical idea of the "ineffable essence" of the Platonists. Christ calls God emphatically, "My Father;" and human sympathies

* See Introduction to the "Song of Solomon" (Hewlett's Bible).

have a more tangible resting-place, in this familiar and domestic idea, than in the mere metaphysical abstractions of philosophy. Christianity *reveals* no more of the nature and essence of God than the theology of Plato. "No man hath seen God at any time," say the Christian Scriptures—a dogma apparently intended rather to instruct gross popular ignorance, than to announce a philosophical novelty. "God is a Spirit," is a "revelation" of the same kind. He is "without body, parts, or passions." He is "One," "everlasting," "of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness," is the language of the Church; but all this is the common teaching of Plato and of Christ. Christianity leaves unsolved the difficulty of realizing the idea of a *personal* God, without associating with it the limitations of matter. Moreover, is it not possible that the Platonic notion of "cause, operation, and effect," may have been the basis of the doctrine of the Christian Trinity—more particularly when we remember how intimately versed in the Platonic philosophy were the founders of the Patristic theology, and how many of them came direct from the Platonic schools into the bosom of the Christian Church*? A dangerous "speculative and logical" theology survives at the present day, we are told†, the fruit of the philosophical tendencies of the Fathers. The speculations on the subject of the

* See "Ancient Christianity," by Isaac Taylor, vol. i., page 147, and elsewhere.

† See Hampden's "Bampton Lectures," Lect. II.

Trinity commenced, probably, in the second century, when the Platonism of Alexandria was the ascendant system; and, if we are to believe Dr. Hampden, it was "*dialectical science* that furnished the expedients and established that peculiar phraseology which we now use—Three Persons and One God."* On the same authority we may perhaps conclude, without irreverence, that both Paul and Christ were, even in the Gospel age, in some degree accomplished in the popular logic; which is inferred from St. Paul "disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God," and the dexterous use of the "dilemma" by Christ, in discussing the "baptism of John."†

The writings of Dr. Hampden may tend to the introduction of a more rational and philosophical Christianity, but this can only be effected by the total destruction of the present doctrinal system of the Church. If, "strictly to speak, in the Scripture itself there are no doctrines,"‡ and if (as I think has been proved, and indeed is generally admitted) there is no special revelation of a system of ethics, it is really difficult to conceive the grounds upon which they are assumed to be inspired in any miraculous sense; but whether we are to attribute it to a natural timidity of temper, or to the wisdom of an expectant Churchman, the Oxford Professor, from very liberal and enlightened premises, has

* See "Bampton Lectures," by Hampden, Lect. III.

† Ibid., Lect. II.

‡ Ibid., Lect. VIII.

come to a very "lame and impotent conclusion."* A few of such "candid friends," however, as Dr. Hampden and Isaac Taylor would suffice for the total destruction of the Church of England.

I think, then, that it is sufficiently demonstrated, that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, excepting so far as they are distinguished by the attestation of miracles, (a question elsewhere discussed,) must be regarded precisely in the same light—as the highest spiritual philosophy of every age—inspired by the same Divine Spirit, which appears never to have been without its witnesses, more or less informed, amongst mankind. No one can deny that "God's truth" is to be found in the sublime teaching of Christ—no one denies that so long as the writers of the Old and New Testaments followed the suggestions of God's Spirit, working in their hearts, they were preserved from the inculcation of moral error—we may concede thus much to the Grecian sages—to Plato, to Fenelon, to Thomas à Kempis, or Wesley. Taking a large view of the spiritual history of the world, we find the same eternal principles of virtue and holiness, (allowing something for the variations of manners,) transmitted from age to age, by those pure and heroic souls, who have never been wanting, to carry on the golden chain that links us to heaven. We find it in the hands of Moses, and a long line of Jewish prophets—in those of Zoroaster, Confucius, and Plato—of Christ and

* See "Bampton Lectures," Lect. VIII., page 379.

Paul, and of many of the Christian Fathers—we find it sustained (though somewhat loosely indeed) by Mahomet*, in Arabia—by St. Bernard, and a host of others, in France, Spain, and Italy, during the middle ages. Wickliffe and Luther sustained it in England and Germany, clearing it partially from the many stains it had contracted during the dark ages; and when the present age shall have sufficiently corrupted the truth, God will again give us his witness, restoring us to a faith in his everlasting presence in the world—a faith not derived from "tradition," but from "insight"†—a faith not in dead histories, but living realities, a revelation to our innermost nature, that "God is the *same* yesterday, *to-day,* and for ever!"

These, then, are the "inspired" of the world—they who, in dark ages, were deified after death for the blessings they conferred on mankind; and the greatest of these was Christ, the holiest, the wisest, the most enduring, the most "inspired."

It is precisely when nations have sunk into the lowest depths of moral degradation, that the Divine and inspired Man has ever appeared. It was so with Moses and the Jewish prophets, with Socrates in Greece, with Confucius in China, with Christ in Palestine, with Mahomet, with Knox, with Luther, and with Wickliffe. Thus is God never without a

* See Thomas Carlyle's "Heroes and Hero Worship" for a profound insight into the spiritual character of Mahomet.

† See Emerson's "Nature," Introduction, page 1.

witness in the world*. The Spirit of God, like the vestal fire, is never extinguished in the human soul; now burning in the bosom of Jeremiah, now kindling a holy and genial warmth in the heart of Jesus, glowing fiercely in the stern nature of Knox, or gently animating the mild and melancholy Melancthon. These are the "inspired of God," who, amidst the crimes, follies, and corruptions of the world, are moved by the spirit of truth, faith, wisdom and love, to call back the faithless world to the first principles of virtue and holiness. The recorded words and deeds of these "higher natures" are consecrated by their posterity, and they become, themselves, the objects of devout admiration or actual worship, according to the enlightenment of the age in which they lived. The Jewish peasant knelt at the feet of Christ, and even of Paul, (who rebuked his idolatry,) and the modern ultra-Protestant all but idolizes the Fathers of the Reformation.

There are men of learning and historical research, who, like Ullman, as I have said, believe that men of genius appear in the world, in conformity with a law of which the regular manifestation may be traced in the spiritual history of the world. Nor does this idea conflict (as may appear at first sight)

* Ullman, whose learning (and even orthodoxy) will not be disputed, contends for the *periodical* appearance of men of genius in conformity to established law. See "Worship of Genius," Supplementary Remarks in answer to Schwab.

with the established belief in God's intelligent government of the universe, but rather tends to the support of that cherished hypothesis. The Christian Scriptures, indeed, assure us, that the appearance of Christ was preordained before the foundation of the world, and they tell us also that the particular period of his manifestation was also preordained. "The fulness of time" was precisely that period in the world's history when the Divine Man was required by its moral necessities, and which had been "heralded amongst the Jews by the law and the prophets, and amongst heathen nations by myths and symbols, by philosophy and poetry." The orthodoxy of Ullman will, I hope, protect *his* theory of law from the fate of that pointed out in the "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation," whose author has been so fiercely assailed by the shallow pedantry of orthodoxy, and the cant of fanaticism.

"God was," indeed, "in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." And but little deduction need be made from the rapturous language of Paul, who tells us that in Him "dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead *bodily*."* In him was realized the ideal of Faith and Love, that has been the burden of spiritual desire to the true prophets of every age; and thus for eighteen hundred years has the Galilæan peasant ruled the nations from his urn. A

* The Christian Æsthetician would have little difficulty in agreeing with the Apostle in the *spirit* of his language.

true faith and a pure love are the choicest gifts of God to the human soul, and they who have possessed these "heavenly gifts" have ever been the "lights of the world." The greatest boon that man thus endowed can confer on man is to restore his lost faith in the dignity and worthiness of human life—to show him an honourable and useful place in the universe—to give him an intelligent trust in a wise and beneficent Providence, instead of a despairing Atheism, scantily covered by the dead forms of popular superstitions, and to make the heart's desire something more than a "rhapsody of words." This was the glorious achievement of Christ for his age and nation, dimly seen through the mist of centuries, obscured by the exaggerations of his oriental disciples, and the corruptions of a dogmatic theology.

I have thus far been considering a single definition of the word inspiration, as it is applied to the sacred writings. To enter into a complete examination of the various views entertained by different writers of the meaning of this mysterious word, would be to plunge into a maze of inextricable confusion, contradiction, and absurdity. There is not in the English language a word which has suffered so many perversions from the sophistry of logicians, and the pedantry of the learned. In Hewlett's Bible, the notes on the 2nd Epistle to Timothy, ch. iii. v. 16, present us, in juxtaposition, with the several opinions of Horsley, of Watson, of St. Austin, and Secker. The first appears

to advocate the doctrine of "plenary inspiration" in its widest sense, whilst the others, with various modifications, seem generally to consider, that the superintendence of the Holy Ghost over the minds of the sacred writers was confined to occasional and providential interference, leaving them liable to the ordinary imperfections of profane writers, both in the recording of facts, and in the exercise of their reason. A very slight acquaintance with controversial divinity would enable the reader to multiply these varieties of opinion in the modern Church.

Neither do the Scriptures themselves give us any intelligible solution of the meaning of "inspiration." The passage before us, "All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God," (if the assertion is not confined, as seems probable, to the Old Testament,) can clearly have no reference to any writings not then in existence. St. Paul, in discussing the nature of "spiritual gifts," furnishes us with no solution of this difficult matter. The "diversities of gifts," to which he alludes*, are nothing more than those different "gifts," which, in common parlance, we attribute to the various tempers and talents of men, and the spirit of God, by which they are imparted to us, is here clearly a natural, and not a miraculous revelation. The "difference of administration" is a mere distinction of the common duties of life—"diversities of operation" are various degrees of mental energy—the "word of wisdom" is a Hebraism for eloquence—"prophecy" a synonym for *preach-*

* See 1 Cor. ch. xii.

ing—and the "discerning of spirits" a wise intuition by which we distinguish between the true and false. In reference, however, to the former passage*, from the 2nd Epistle to Timothy, it seems to be admitted that the common translation is vicious, as the words "is given" are not found in the original Greek, and thus the whole force of the passage is reduced to a vague generality, which would suit almost any conceivable idea ever attached to the doctrine of inspiration.

I have elsewhere noticed the laxity of *Patristic* opinion on the same subject, the Fathers having readily conceded a degree of inspiration to the Greek philosophy; and, in short, there appears never to have existed, in the Church, any more definite idea on the subject than at the present moment. Both amongst the ancient and modern champions of the faith the word "inspiration" will be found often in the same book, vaguely used in different senses—at one moment narrowed to the requisitions of the Church, at another stretched to the interpretation of philosophy. "Everything," says Goethe, "can be maintained when one permits oneself to use words altogether vaguely, to employ them in a sense now wider and now narrower, now closer and now more remote."†

The appearance of almost every new work of science has involved some modification of the popular idea. A recent writer‡, distinguished for his

* See 1 Cor. ch. xii.

† See "Autobiography," page 325.

‡ Dr. Pritchard. See "Physical History of Mankind."

learning, his talents, and, I believe, for his orthodoxy, has utterly abandoned the received chronology of the Bible, from the birth of Adam to the call of Abraham, giving up at once, as inconsistent with each other, and with all natural probability, scientific and moral, the accounts of the ages of the patriarchs, recorded in the Hebrew, Samaritan, and Septuagint versions*. The sciences of geology and ethnology seem to be both verging towards the same point, and demanding the same concessions. The geologist requires an almost indefinite period of time for the formation of his rocks; and Dr. Pritchard is almost equally exorbitant in his demands for the establishment of his ethnological theories. The notion, that the whole family of man was collected together in the neighbourhood of Mount Ararat, about 2000 years only before the Christian era, is irreconcileable with any rational account of the endless varieties of the American races, of those of Australia, Polynesia, and the interior of Africa. "However high," says Niebuhr, "we may rise towards the epoch of the beginning of the human race, still the annals of the Egyptians and Babylonians would fill up but a small part of the inscrutable period during which nations must have been in no less active collision than in after-times." In short, it is absolutely come

* I have not in this essay mooted the question of the genuineness or authenticity of any of the books of the Old Testament; though it is well known that Hobbes asserted that the Pentateuch was written by Ezra, and the learned Le Clerc that it was certainly *not* written by Moses.

to this, that we must altogether abandon science, or modify our ideas of the inspiration of the Mosaic records. The hollow truce that has been patched up between the clerical geologist of Oxford* and believers in the popular theology will hardly survive another lustre of scientific inquiry.

After conceding the sufficiency of Dr. Pritchard's hypothesis (the supposed fabulousness of the Scripture chronology from Adam to Abraham,) for his scientific purposes, an anonymous critic † very ably observes, "It is true the same result might be attained by a much simpler and, as it seems to us, more obvious and philosophical method—by supposing that the Jews, like every other nation of antiquity, have framed for themselves a *mythical* history, which, with the lapse of time, has been received for fact. This at once releases us from the necessity of any elaborate contrivances for reconciling their belief with probability and the laws of nature; and exhibits a phenomenon so universal and so natural, that it would have been a miracle if the Jewish literature had been an exception to it. But the transition, from regarding the first chapters of Genesis as an inspired record, to treating them as only a picture of the popular notions of the age in which they were produced, is too violent to be made at once by any large portion of the public. We are not sorry, therefore, that from time to time hypo-

* Dr. Buckland.

† See "Prospective Review," No. XI., page 366.

theses are proposed which smooth the descent from one of these opinions to the other, and make the gradients safer. The clerical geologists would have been suspended by their diocesans, or hooted from their pulpits, if they had not been able, at first, to profess that their discoveries confirmed the Mosaic account of the Deluge, and did not contravene that of the Creation. Time has familiarized men with the idea that they are not to look into Scripture for geology; and we hope that its professors will soon come openly to avow this, and cease to torture the words of Genesis into a conformity with their science. Public opinion is so tyrannically intolerant, and its penal power so fearful, that we cannot expect the whole truth to be told, or even to be seen, at once. But while we admit the temporary value of such intermediate stages of opinion, we are bound to declare our judgment, that they are merely temporary, and have no solid basis."

It is to be observed, moreover, that the clerical opposition to the progress of ethnological science is to be traced to another and a deeper cause. The whole doctrinal system of the Church reposes on the frail foundation of the *literal* truth of the Mosaic account of the fall of man, and the origin of mankind from a single pair; and if a merely mythical character be given to the book of Genesis, the whole fabric of the popular theology must fall to the ground.

In conclusion, then, the Scriptures can only be said to be "inspired" in a sense far more restricted

than what is required to sustain the authority which is given to them by the popular theology. Many believers carry to the account of "inspiration" the dogmatical wisdom of Solomon, and the poetical beauties of Isaiah; but this is the same "inspiration" which is popularly attributed to the sublimities of Milton or Shakespeare, or even to the homely wisdom of Benjamin Franklin; for "Poor Richard's Almanack" abounds in the peculiar wisdom at least of the book of Proverbs. The daily prayers of the Church implore for every individual soul the gifts of God's spirit, and shall this Divine guide be denied to the benevolent Howard or Elizabeth Fry, whilst it is supposed to have blessed in an especial manner the backsliding Peter, or the incredulous Thomas! The power and influence of the modern saint on his age and nation cannot be compared with ancient examples, for the rapturous enthusiasm of the East is unknown in our northern climate and advanced civilization. It seems extremely probable, after all, that the words "inspired," "Holy Spirit," "Holy Ghost," and many other synonyms, were actually used in the Scriptures much in the same vague sense* as in modern literature, where we speak of the "Divine Dante," the "inspired Shakespeare," the "inspirations of genius," or the "spirit of love;" and surely we cannot deny to the florid writers of the East a latitude so freely in-

* See the learned Gilbert Wakefield's Notes to his translation of St. Matthew's Gospel, section II., page 7 (quarto edition).

dulged in by those of the cold and passionless north.

In examining the sacred writings, (for which there is claimed a supernatural exemption from all the imperfections that distinguish other religious writings,) we find, in the Old Testament, the most foolish fables of a dark age superstitiously recorded, —occasionally, even, false morals inculcated, and the lowest *motives* to virtuous action suggested; (for Warburton* long ago admitted that temporal rewards and punishments were the highest; and it is clear that Moses had a very imperfect, if any, idea at all of the immortality of the soul) — we find witchcraft and magic spoken of in the same terms as by our forefathers in England three centuries ago. We find, as has often been observed, a code of barbarous and ferocious laws, of which God is assumed to be the direct author, and the unrelenting administrator. In the New Testament records (waiving all *critical* objections to their authenticity and genuineness) we find errors *in fact*, errors in reasoning, doubtful meanings, and unintelligible allusions to forgotten events — the same Jewish fables—devils going bodily into swine and conversing in human language—miracles, in spite of the orthodox explanations and glosses, precisely similar to those of the middle ages — we find recorded the belief of these "inspired" persons in the approaching end of the world, which was not

* See "Divine Legation."

accomplished—we find also recorded, the squabbles of these persons about the circumcision, very much the same as those going on about "baptismal regeneration," or anything else, amongst angry Churchmen at the present time. We find, in short, every evidence of human infirmity, both in the writers and in the record, that can possibly be conceived, and yet we are to believe, on their authority, facts the most repulsive to common sense,—that the order of nature was changed, and the law of gravitation suspended in the valleys of Palestine, and that God himself specially inspired them with false philosophy, vicious logic, and bad grammar. This is, certainly, the popular notion of the inspiration of the Scriptures, and the great mass of the Christian world are at this moment, instead of worshipping God, worshipping the *Bible*—putting the assumed record of God's will before the "inward witness" of his spirit! *

But can such a belief as this long survive in an age of intelligent inquiry? A juster and more rational idea of God's dealings with us is fast spreading through the Christian world. The sublime philosophy of the Gospel teaches us that the Spirit of God is poured upon all flesh. The "inspired" followers of Christ, being blessed with Eastern

* See Barclay's "Apology for the Quakers," Prop. II., sect. IV. It is curious to find the learned Quaker and J. J. Rousseau, in "La Nouvelle Heloise," using the same language: "Quelque respect que je doive au texte sacré," says Rousseau, "j'en dois plus encore à son Auteur."

imaginations, could easily discover the Divine Messenger in the form (or, more strictly speaking, descending after the manner) of a dove, or as "cloven tongues of fire;" but modern wisdom teaches us to look for it in a less palpable form. The human soul has sympathy and comprehension for the God dwelling within us, but the spiritual idea is degraded and lost by association with a material substance. When the bosom swells with virtuous emotion, or the eyes fill with tears of tenderness, we feel the presence of a higher nature, and need no other revelation of the present God. Even in the mixed and motley crowd of a theatre, gathered together for the mere indulgence of the senses, the heroic sentiment, the tender word, the simple trait of fidelity or of honesty, will often touch some chord of sympathy lying deep in the common heart, producing a virtuous harmony far more sincere, more profound, and more universal, than is elicited by the most gorgeous display of a religious ceremonial, or the highest exhibition of pulpit eloquence. If we look, in our best moments, into the deep of our hearts, we find, amidst much confusion, the indestructible elements of the Divine nature. And what is the origin of this everlasting instinct? Is it an old revelation handed down to us by religious systems, (for all religious systems have actually embodied it,) from age to age from the earliest time? Is morality a tradition, the source of which is hidden from us in the mist of time, or is it the natural growth of the human

heart, a part of the nature a holy God has imparted to his creatures? The last is by far the most rational hypothesis. The instinct of conscience is absolutely universal—the man is yet to be born who has never blushed—in the lowest depths of human degradation "the still small voice" is sometimes heard.

May not this be the spirit that "God giveth to all men liberally," and in the highest degree to those pure and holy natures, who have, in different ages, most gladly entertained it? May not this be the Divine guide, that preserved from moral error the writers of the sacred volume? Assuredly, this alone, is God's revelation to man. Whether, with the orthodox Churchman, we call it the "Holy Ghost," with the Socinian, "Conscience," or, with the Quaker, confuse the two *ideas*—it is utterly indifferent, as long as the *thing*—the *fact*, remains the same.

The watchful education, then, of the conscience is the proper end of religious teaching. False teaching may mystify, a sensual life may deaden, various passions and affections may impair or pervert its sensibility, but the Divine instinct is never altogether extinguished in the human soul. It is by looking inward, in perfect sincerity, that we "meet God face to face." Under this guidance, if we seek truth, in the absolute love of it, loving it better than life, better than station, better than fame, than all success, intellectual or worldly—better even than the "friends of our bosom"—if we seek truth in this

spirit, and with this guidance, we are sure to find it. Then are we "inspired," for God has breathed into our souls the breath of spiritual life. Then are we "seers" and "prophets of the most High God;" and whilst we are "obedient to the heavenly vision," though we may carry our light in a vessel of clay, we are true reflectors of the Divine Nature. God incarnates himself in man, and Christ is the highest ideal yet presented to mankind of the mystical union of the two natures, the human and divine, the highest model for devout imitation. The "true shepherds" of the fold of Christ are they who, in every age, have most powerfully influenced for good the human soul, by enlarging the field of spiritual desire. The pens of Plato, of Paul, and of Dante, the pencils of Raphael and of Claude, the chisels of Canova and of Chantrey, no less than the voices of Knox, of Wickliffe, and of Luther, are ministering instruments, in different degrees, of the Divine Spirit. The true ideal of the priest, the poet, and the prophet, is beautifully embodied in the following "charmed words" of one of the most original, the most profound, and the most sincere of modern philosophers*. "It is very certain, that it is the effect of conversation with the beauty of the soul to beget a desire and need, to impart to others the same knowledge and love. If utterance is denied, the thought lies like a burden on the man. Always

* See Emerson's "Orations," in the "Address to the Divinity Class," at Cambridge, U. S.

the seer is a sayer. Somehow his dream is told. Somehow he publishes it with solemn joy. Sometimes with pencil on canvas; sometimes with chisel on stone; sometimes in towers and aisles of granite, his soul's worship is builded; sometimes in anthems of indefinite music; but clearest and most permanent in words.

"The man enamoured of this excellency becomes its priest or poet. The office is coeval with the world. But observe the condition, the spiritual limitation of the office. *The Spirit only can teach.* Not any profane man, not any sensual, not any liar, not any slave can teach, but only he can give who has; he can only create who *is*. The man on whom the soul descends, through whom the soul speaks, alone can teach. Courage, piety, love, wisdom, can teach; and every man can open his door to these angels, and they shall bring him the gift of tongues. But the man who aims to speak as books enable, as synods use, as the fashion guides, and as interest commands—babbles. Let him hush."

In conclusion, there is not a shadow of reason for believing that Christ ever intended his religion to be specially expounded by four Gospels, by the Acts, and by the Epistles. Nothing appears in his recorded history and teaching to lead us to suppose that he contemplated *any* written account of himself or his religion. He appears (like all others in similar circumstances, as oral public teachers,) to have relied mainly on his per-

sonal influence on those who heard him, for the extension of his principles by ordinary and natural means. Our modern "Bibliolatry" is founded solely on the teaching of the Church—the authority of the Church alone has supported the authority of the Scriptures.

CHAPTER III.

MIRACLES AND PROPHECY.

"God never wrought miracles to convince Atheism, because his ordinary works convince it."—BACON.

A BRIEF inquiry into the philosophy and history of belief in miraculous agency, and its connection with ancient and modern Christianity, will form the subject of the present Chapter. I believe that, previous to the publication of Dr. Middleton's "Free Inquiry," all miracles recorded by the Church, up to the conversion of Constantine, were considered as orthodox as those of the Gospels; and such is still, probably, the opinion of the largest portion of the Christian world. Amongst Protestants, this belief is now generally confined (though not perhaps entirely*) to the apostolic age. As civilization has advanced and knowledge has been diffused, the credulity of mankind has gradually diminished; and whilst, in an ignorant age, the miracles were con-

* Palmer, in his "Church History," appears neither to affirm nor deny the modern miracles of the Church.

stantly appealed to as direct proofs of the truth of revelation, they are now generally kept in the background by the more rational part of our spiritual guides.

The various and conflicting views of the miracles of the Old and New Testaments, entertained even by orthodox writers of almost every age, furnish a striking proof of the tenderness of the ground on which they repose. The miraculous staying of the sun at the command of Joshua—the history of Jonah, and a variety of other supernatural events, have been referred by learned Christians to the convenient class of allegory, or resolved into "bold metaphors." The temptation of Christ is thus quietly disposed of by Bishop Porteus, and the whole account of demoniacal possession in the New Testament is still an open question between fact and fable. One writer asserts that demoniacal possession was epilepsy—another that it was madness; and a third, a disease peculiar to the age. The rationalist Christians of Germany have gone still further in the same path, and, by giving a mythical character to the whole Gospel history, endeavoured to bring it into harmony with reason and with nature*. These are the struggles of awakened intelligence endeavouring to shake off the nightmare of superstition by which it has been encumbered in the long night of the dark ages.

So late, indeed, as the reign of our "good Queen

* See Sträuss's "Leben Jesu."

Anne," the miraculous power of the royal touch in the cure of scrofula was generally believed, and, according to Whiston, "a form of touching for the evil" was actually printed in the liturgies of the period*. A sermon of Bishop Bull's, who died in 1709, is still extant, in which that learned prelate distinctly asserts the miraculous power of the royal touch, in the lineal descendants of St. Edward the Confessor. Dr. Johnson in his childhood was, as is well known, submitted by his parents to this ridiculous ceremony, in the efficacy of which they, no doubt, devoutly believed.

That a belief in miraculous agency should thus exist in the 18th century, or even at the present moment, is simply to be referred to the authoritative teaching of the Church; for there is in reality no sufficient reason for denying the same miraculous powers to the Bishops of Exeter or of London, which were once freely conceded to Justin Martyr or Irenæus. It is certain that the ignorant vulgar believe the miracles of the Church solely on her own authority—they humbly receive this as they do every other doctrine of their faith, on that authority alone, without exercising or attempting to exercise that right of private judgment so boastingly assumed to be the badge of the Protestant. The assumed universality of the belief in miracles amongst all classes of Christians must not be considered, therefore, as any evidence of their reasonableness or of

* See Miss Strickland's "Queens of England," vol. xii. page 109.

their truth. When we consider that the vulgar of all denominations, and an immense mass even of the educated classes, are utterly unacquainted with the peculiar religious literature by which the teaching of the Church is supported*—that they know and care nothing about subtle questions of moral evidence, minute criticisms of philology and grammar, or even the disputed *facts* of religious history, we may fairly conclude that they give nothing more than an "otiose" assent to the teaching of the Church. This is the simple *Popery* of all "articled" Churches—the Church of Rome being only distinguished from the rest by the logical consistency with which she endeavours to carry out the principle on which she is founded.

To the poor and illiterate man of the present age, the Bible, with all its mysteries and miracles, is simply an object of idolatrous reverence. The mysterious doctrines—the religious metaphysics—the profound criticism and subtle learning by which it is overlaid for the educated reader, are entirely lost upon the illiterate believer. The vulgar idea I conceive to be, that God has twice and only twice actually spoken to mankind, once in the Hebrew and once in the Greek language—these being the chosen tongues of the Divine Lawgiver. The various records that compose the sacred volume are

* The almost incredible corruption—the fraudulent miracles and demonolatry sanctioned by the Nicene Church of the fourth century, (the model Church of the "Oxford Tracts,") is ably exposed in "Ancient Christianity."

looked upon as objects of devout adoration, as much as if they had actually fallen down from heaven—a childlike reliance on priestly authority extending even to translations of translations the same sacred character that attached to the original records. All truth and all wisdom—scientific and moral—"the whole counsel of God," are literally assumed to be comprehended "in the words of a book;" and, though it is true that a moral sense of right and wrong is generally admitted to be an *original* element in human nature, yet the concession is so qualified by a pious mysticism, and so obscured by theological disputation, that the believer is left but little reliance on the inspirations of conscience. The doctrines of original sin and human infirmity are so taught as to neutralize all practical dependence on the "inward witness." When such is the condition of the religious mind, not only of the illiterate vulgar, but of the half-instructed laity of all classes, it is easy to account for the still existing credulity on the subject of miracles.

I have thus far spoken of the Church herself, and the sincere and orthodox members of her communion, and I now turn to that large and increasing class of reflecting minds who see in religion nothing but an instrument of moral regeneration, and in the Christian Scriptures a simple history of its highest development. How will the popular doctrine of miracles be entertained in an age of free thought and bold inquiry—how will it fare with "the mind amongst the spindles"—with the free literature of

America, of France, and of Germany, pouring daily from the press? A few centuries ago, when Religion and Philosophy were found in collision, (as in the case of Galileo,) Philosophy was accommodated to the popular creed. In modern instances of the same collision, (as in the case of Dr. Buckland and his geological heresies,) Religion has been accommodated to the requisitions of Philosophy, and advanced to the level of the intelligence of the age. The pretensions of Revelation, indeed, were, in this last case, nominally upheld, but the idea of an infallible and literal inspiration was frittered away in liberal concessions. Philosophy, sometimes considered the handmaid of Revelation, has assumed the character of a rival sister.

If, indeed, we examine the miraculous accounts contained in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures by the light of modern science, and seek for illustrations and explanations in the reports of modern travellers in the East, familiarizing ourselves with the habits of thought, the manners and customs of eastern nations, there is hardly a single miracle recorded in these writings that may not receive the most simple and natural solution. A general belief in the powers of magic * is known to have existed in the apostolic age, and long afterwards. The "magical arts" daily practised in the streets of modern Cairo † excite almost as much wonder amongst our own

* Both Celsus and Porphyry refer the Christian miracles to magic.

† See Lane's "Modern Egyptians," vol. ii. page 85.

countrymen as they did amongst the less civilized subjects of the early Pharaohs, and the exploits of the serpent-charmer are not less curious and startling than the recorded command of St. Paul over the serpent at Malta. In the latter instance, moreover, the credulity of the witnesses, who believed the Apostle to have been a god, for this doubtful manifestation of his power, is not very favourable to the character of the transaction. In modern Egypt, the "power of raising the dead"* is generally believed, even by the educated classes, to be possessed by the most eminent "welees." A considerable knowledge of chemistry and other cognate sciences is said to be sometimes acquired by the professors of magic, and drugs and perfumes are amongst the agents employed in the work of deception †. Should the powers of chloroform or of the vapour of ether be known to the pharmacopœia of magic, (a supposition not absolutely improbable,) it is impossible to overrate the influence of such agents in the illiterate and credulous East. One thing, however, is fully established—a general belief in miracles daily performed in the public streets. "Even the more sober and learned of the people" are devout believers in these supernatural powers, and the most incredulous

* See Lane's "Modern Egyptians," vol. ii. page 86.

† *Magnetism* appears to have been well understood by the *Egyptian hierarchy.*—"We find that *epilepsy, derangement,* and many other disorders dependent on the nervous system, were cured by the Egyptian *priests.*" See "The Crescent and the Cross," vol. i. pages 149–155.

Europeans are unable to account for the singular exhibitions they have witnessed—an inquiry into which has not been considered beneath the notice of a Quarterly Reviewer *. Without following the Reviewer in his critical inquiries, or attempting to account for or deny the reality of these magical powers, it is fair to conclude that illusions which still continue to awe or to puzzle, according to his temperament, the modern spectator, must have had an equal, at least, if not a far greater effect on the contemporaries of the Apostles.

But for the general teaching of history, we might be led to suppose that the primitive Christian miracles were essentially different in their character from those said to have been performed by the Fathers—by St. Bernard and a host of others—and a constant endeavour to distinguish between them has occupied the ingenuity of the modern Protestant clergy. It may be generally admitted, indeed, that the miracles of the New Testament had a far higher *object* than the popular magic; and it is extremely probable that the earnest and zealous propagators of the new faith availed themselves freely and perhaps credulously of the temper of their age, to inculcate by any and every means in their power the Divine philosophy that inspired them. One thing at least is certain, in regard to the whole question under discussion, that faith in miraculous agency has

* See "Quarterly Review," No. 117, page 202. In the last edition of Mr. Lane's book the discovery of the trick is announced.

gradually and steadily declined before the advance of civilization, and the spread of intelligence; and thus it often happens that an event assumed, in one age, to be a miraculous deviation from the law of Nature, is explained as being in exact conformity with it, by the riper science of the next*.

Modern writers, who have openly impugned the doctrine of miracles, have generally endeavoured to explain them on some single hypothesis, which often proves to be insufficient to meet the great variety of conditions and circumstances, with which the miracles have been handed down to us. In Germany, where every literary man has his own peculiar crotchet, and each religiously abstains from the least appropriation of thoughts of his neighbour, the insufficiency of this mode of disposing of the question is more particularly manifest. We find one German writer † endeavouring to explain away the miracles on the "mystical theory," and another riding into the arena of controversy on the miserable hobby-horse of "clairvoyance," and "mesmerism;" each of these, and a host of others of the same class, rejecting whatever light is thrown on the question by all other "theories" whatsoever. The coarse and undiscriminating criticism of most of the French and English Deists explains the whole theory of

* Lord Bacon and Rousseau had evidently common ideas on the subject of belief in miracles, each attributing it to the popular ignorance of natural philosophy. The age of Bacon, of course, made him more cautious in the expression of his opinions. Compare "Aphorisms" of Bacon with "Letters from the Mountains," Letters I. and II.

† Strauss.

miracles on the supposition of the grossest fraud, acting on the grossest credulity, and makes no distinction between the miracles of the middle ages, evidently got up to sustain a corrupt and tyrannical Church, and those assumed to have happened amongst the simple, unlettered, and earnest propagators of a new and pure faith. Now, it is clear that such methods of disposing of the Christian miracles will have but little success, as long as there exists in the world any love of argumentative honesty—any sentiment of religious veneration. The believers in miracles will always secure some partial triumph over these one-sided and pedantic and these unscrupulous and dishonest assailants of their time-honoured superstition. A great accession to the ranks of reason and common sense would be gained, by disproving the *reality* of the miracles without damaging the veracity or honesty of the simple, earnest, and enthusiastic writers by whom they are recorded—by showing that the Christian religion may be substantially true, though the miracles be false. This has been supposed (rashly, I think) an impossible achievement, by those who have never fairly considered the anomalies and varieties of impression to which the human mind is liable, in circumstances of excitement, and the many mysterious mental conditions revealed by psychological history*. I presume that Emanuel Sweden-

* The amiable William Law, the author of the "Serious Call," the most rational of religious books, devoutly believed in the inspiration of Jacob Behmen.

borg is not generally considered either a hypocrite or a lunatic. The general soundness of his mind is fully established by his philosophical writings; no one has ventured to impeach the moral purity of his life, or to doubt his earnest and abiding desire, for a quarter of a century, to advance the spiritual condition of his species. Men of science, of learning, and piety, have associated to disseminate his theology, which has even been taught unrebuked, I am told, by some of the clergy of the English Church.

Now, if any man will compare the supposed revelations of Swedenborg with the accounts of the temptation of Christ given by the most rational commentators, ancient and modern, (which generally resolve the affair into a mental abstraction,) I think it is impossible not to observe precisely the same visionary elements. The ancient prophets, moreover, almost universally "dreamed dreams and saw visions," (as in the case of Ezekiel,) much in the same manner as the modern Swede. This condition of mind, common to prophets and seers, priests and poets, (more especially in the early ages of the world,) will be readily recognised by the curious in psychological history. The religious writings, then, of Swedenborg, are the fruit of an ecstatic state of mind, of which the spiritual history of the world affords us many celebrated examples. It can hardly be called an abnormal condition of the mind, though it may assume that character in the estimation of the vulgar, the sensual, and the thoughtless. Both

the early and later Platonists*, (whose philosophy coloured so many centuries of the classical world, and so extensively leavened Christianity itself,) were for ever wandering beyond the regions of sense into the mysterious confines of the spiritual world. St. Paul, no doubt, describes this condition of the soul, when he says, "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell," it is illustrated by the "vision of Ezekiel"—by the "Demon of Socrates"—by the visions of seers and prophets of all ages—by that of Peter, recorded in the Acts, and of St. John in the Revelations. In more recent times we may trace it, in feebler colours, in the mysticism of Malebranche, the "quietism" and "pietism" of the French Catholics of the seventeenth century, in the revelations of Behmen in Germany, of Swedenborg in Sweden, and, perhaps, even of James Naylor in England. It will be seen, by the list I have given of the instruments it has inspired, that the "heavenly vision" consists with very unequal developments of mental power, and different degrees of genius, but that it still may be regarded as consistent with, and, indeed, often the plainest evidence of, the deepest spiritual insight. The visions of St. Peter are as *material* as those of Swedenborg, but they who may turn with incredulity from the literal interpretation of these "memorable

* The slightest acquaintance with the writings of Plato himself, and with those of the later Platonists, of Proclus, of Porphyry, and of Plotinus, is sufficient to show that an ecstatic and visionary state of mind is perfectly reconcileable with sincerity, with genius, and with virtue.

relations," will be attracted by the deep thought and almost supernatural insight they severally display in expounding the philosophy of the human mind. It is probable that the vision of the seer may become less clear as the world advances in science and exact intelligence, and that in modern times, and northern climates, a smaller class may be subject to these ecstatic conditions than amongst the primitive nations of the East.

Now, in discussing the credibility of the Christian miracles, it is absolutely necessary to regard the character of the age in which they are said to have been performed, and of those who witnessed and recorded them. The simple narratives of the Evangelists afford abundant proof of the superstitious and credulous temper of their age. The miraculous power of healing, ascribed to the pool of Bethesda by the Jewish populace, who believed that an angel descended at certain seasons to trouble the water, (for this, no doubt, was the popular belief, despite the learned glosses of commentators*,) is a proof that the common faith in miraculous agency was not confined to the pretensions of Christ. It is probable that the people of Jerusalem, like those of Cairo and other eastern cities at the present time, devoutly believed in the reality of the miracles daily performed before their eyes. Throughout the middle ages, and down to our own times, in Catholic coun-

* I make this assertion, fully aware of the learned ingenuity of Calmet, Rosenmüller, and others, who have endeavoured to torture the word "angel" from its popular meaning.

tries, and amongst the ignorant peasantry of our own, the medicinal virtues of wells have been commonly attributed to miraculous causes, and their still surviving names betray the original patronage of the saints, virgins, and martyrs of the Church, of the "Son" and of the "Mother of God." The easy credulity of Nathaniel*, as recorded by St. John, and which appears to have excited the wonder of Christ himself, may be considered as a fair sample of the superstitious temper of his countrymen. The forced inference of commentators, that Christ must have read the thoughts of Nathaniel, and thus excited this extraordinary manifestation of faith, is entirely negatived by the words of Christ himself, so naturally expressive of his wonder at the conversion. The extreme credulity of the populace may also be inferred from the simple account given in the Acts† of the successful sorceries of Simon Magus, "to whom, it is said," "they all gave heed, *from the least to the greatest*, saying, This man is the great power of God."

The author of "Ancient Christianity," who has so cleverly exposed the demonolatry and miracle-mongering of the Nicene Church of the fourth century, seems little aware how easily his argument may be brought to bear on the miracles of the Gospels. He rejects the Nicene miracles because, amongst other reasons, they conflict with what he

* See John's Gospel, i. 49.

† See Acts, viii. 9.

calls the "first truths of religion."* He speaks, philosophically enough, of the "comfort and calm assurance which we derive from beholding the beauty, harmony, and *constancy* of Nature," and requires that true miracles should comport with what he calls (somewhat vaguely) the "*moral style* of the universe." But surely the miracles recorded in the New Testament, as well as those of the Nicene age, are at variance with the teachings of natural religion, which are to be considered amongst the "first truths" of religious belief, as both alike disturb "the beauty, harmony, and *constancy* of Nature." It is difficult, moreover, to understand the "moral style" of the Christian miracles which distinguishes them from those of the fourth century, when we find that the very *same miracles*—the casting out of devils and the raising of the dead—were for the very *same purpose* (that is, for the establishment of the faith of the Church,) actually performed by Christ and by the Nicene Fathers. The author, indeed, *assumes* that the Nicene miracles were wrought for corrupt purposes, which is nothing less than a "petitio principii"—very creditable to his liberal Protestantism, but reflecting little credit on his logical fairness or his critical acumen. In discussing this subject, he plainly denies that the "preternatural" is necessarily "divine"—"that the purely natural course of physical causes is never disturbed but by the finger of God." Now, it is extremely

* See "Ancient Christianity," vol. ii. 360.

difficult to imagine by what means the order of Nature can be disturbed excepting by the will of its Divine Author; but the difficulty is afterwards removed by the assumption of the agency of the "invisible apostate orders!" This is precisely the way that Macneil* has cut the Gordian knot of the Mesmeric philosophy, by simply attributing it to "Satanic agency!"

On the whole, it is extremely probable that the populace who beheld the Gospel miracles were equally credulous with that which was imposed upon by the Nicene doctors; and without assuming the "inspired" character of the testimony to the Gospel miracles, (a question elsewhere discussed, and to assume which is, in fact, to assume the whole question at issue,) we may suppose that the writers of the New Testament merely recorded the popular belief in the miracles performed—their own belief being in general accordance with that of the people.

This supposition does not impeach the honesty of the Evangelists, nor (considering their age and country) is it any great reflection on their understandings†. The religious history of the world has always presented this mixture of rational faith and superstitious credulity; and, indeed, the best argument for dealing tenderly with popular superstitions has ever been founded on the danger there exists, that in touching the superstitions of the people you

* See a Sermon of Macneil's on this subject.

† Not two centuries ago the Scotch judges delivered elaborate and learned judgments on the crime of witchcraft!

may altogether destroy their faith in the spiritual and the unseen. Such was even, I believe, the opinion of Rousseau.

In all popular religions, the profoundest truths of ethics and of natural religion are enshrined amidst the most childish superstitions. Every religious system the world has ever known embodies more or less perfectly (according to the degree of civilization that produced it) these eternal principles of morality; and the "lying wonders" and supernatural pretensions with which these are often overlaid are the accidents of ecclesiastical or political corruption—of ignorance and barbarism. In every age we find men of character, of talent, and of piety, conforming and perhaps often assenting to the popular belief, from motives the most confused and various—from the prejudices of party feeling—from the accident of birth in a particular communion—from the influence of stronger minds—from that tenderness of temperament, and susceptibility of impression, which eagerly desires and too credulously imbibes the flattering mysticism of the spiritual life. The eloquent Bossuet, and the profound and rational Fenelon, were content to administer the corrupt and degraded religion of their age, and, if their faith in it was sometimes impaired, they sought for escape from the seductions of heresy in the dreams of a mystic theology. The learned and liberal Whiston believed in the efficacy of "extreme unction;" and some of our illustrious Reformers, after having shocked the faith of Christendom by declaring that a wafer was

not a God, were ready to confess that God may, in some mysterious manner, be present in a wafer! When we contemplate, in the spiritual history of the world, this endless variety of religious expression, combined with every degree and quality of faith,—when we find the learned and the ignorant alike subject to the universal law, which appears to mock the efforts of mankind to realize and define the faith of the soul, by connecting infirmity and error with its highest aspirations,—we cannot surely hesitate in allowing some human indulgence to the Evangelical writers, and according the same measure to Matthew the publican, and Paul the philosopher, that we freely concede to the learned Whiston or the unlearned Behmen.

A considerable class of supposed miraculous events recorded in the Scriptures may be referred to a very common kind of credulity, which appears to depend upon a morbid influence of the mind upon the senses. The appearance of the cross in the heavens for the conversion of Constantine (once considered the last of the orthodox miracles, though now abandoned) was, no doubt, of this character. The vision of Jacob's ladder—the conversion of St. Paul *—the ascension of Elijah—the various appearances of Christ to his disciples after his crucifixion—his transfiguration—the descent of the Holy Ghost in the form of "cloven tongues of fire," and a great variety of supposed miraculous manifestations

* St. Paul, no doubt, *heard*, at his conversion, one of those

"Airy tongues that syllable men's names,"

so delicately imagined by Milton.

of the same kind, must be referred to the ardent and visionary characters of the reporters*. Erasmus has recorded a curious instance of this kind of self-delusion, which actually occurred in England at the period at which he wrote. For the purpose of testing the credulity of his companions, a person, suddenly looking into a clear and serene sky, commences crossing himself with religious fervour, and exclaims that he beholds overhead "a huge dragon with golden horns." His companions at first looked in vain for the monstrous omen; but at length, by looking long and steadily into the sky, one of the party is made to behold it, and the rest successively follow his example and declare their conviction of the reality of the appearance. Erasmus goes on to say, "that in three days all England had heard the rumour of the mystery, nor were there wanting those who prepared grave commentaries on its meaning!" † Another "modern instance" of a similar "superstition of the sight" is recorded of Shelley‡, whose

* It is impossible to distinguish between the account given by St. Augustine, in his "Confessions," of the circumstances of his Conversion, and that given by St. Paul; and no doubt Lord Herbert, of Cherburg, as devoutly believed in *his* "voice from heaven" as either the Christian Father or the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Irenæus resists the explanation of miracles on the hypothesis of an "illusory appearance" (φαντασιωδως), which proves how early this idea occurred to the common sense of mankind. See Irenæus, lib. ii. c. 57. Lactantius thinks that the miracles might be doubtful, but for the support of prophecy.—See Lact. v. 3.

† See "Colloquiorum Erasmi Opus Aureum," quoted by Martineau in the Notes to the "Rationale of Religious Inquiry."

‡ See Medwin's "Life of Shelley."

belief in a purely imaginary attempt to assassinate him was embodied in a deposition actually made before a magistrate. We may adduce also the well-known case of Colonel Gardiner, reported by Dr. Doddridge, at the close of the last century*. In this instance, by "a visible representation, as it were suspended in the air, of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross," a profligate soldier is suddenly converted into a Christian penitent: the whole event thus supplying not only the miraculous element required to establish the Divine inteference, but also (what is often wanting in these "amazing phenomena," as they are called by the pious reporter,) the moral result in the permanent conversion of the sinner†.

It is only proper, however, to add that Dr. Hibbert confesses, in noticing the event, that Colonel Gardinerhad, a short time previous to its occurrence, met with a fall from his horse, which may possibly have produced some slight concussion of the brain.

Before I quit the subject of miracles, I would briefly advert to two considerations which properly

* See Hibbert's "Philosophy of Apparitions," page 190.

† When Milton, on the eve of composing his "Second Defence," was warned by his physicians that total blindness would be the certain consequence of the study it would require, he tells us that, "undeterred by the warning, I seemed to *hear a voice,* not of a physician, but of some internal and more divine monitor," &c., &c. This was, no doubt, the same voice that Paul heard at his conversion, and the Apostles at the Transfiguration. See "Life of Milton," by Dr. Symmons.

belong to the discussion—the general question of the *evidence* proper to the support of them, and the *moral effect* produced on the mind by a belief in them. The question as to the quantity and quality of the evidence necessary to establish a belief in miraculous agency is put fairly in issue in the well-known controversy between Hume and Paley in the first part of the "Evidences of Christianity."

It is assumed by Paley that we are bound to believe the testimony of twelve men of good character, who could not possibly be deceived (though this by the way is a plain petitio principii), to *any* supernatural event, if they changed their lives in consequence of their belief, and suffered, or were content to suffer torture and death in attestation of their sincerity. I would first of all observe, that the credibility of the *Gospel* miracles does not depend, however, on the issue of this discussion, inasmuch as no such testimony as what is here supposed can be fairly produced in favour of them. Without impeaching the general character of the Evangelical writers for honesty and sincerity, we have nevertheless but a very slight acquaintance with their personal characteristics, intellectual or moral; and this too supplied to us by a record eighteen centuries old, and which itself contains innumerable proofs of the fallibility of its authors, both in the interpretation of doctrines and in the recording of facts. Again, the history of the world affords abundant examples of men being content to suffer death and torture in attestation of their belief of the wildest superstitions.

But I am prepared to meet the orthodox champion on the ground he has himself chosen, and even, whilst admitting his premises, (excepting always the assumption that the witnesses to the miracles could not be deceived, which is in fact the question at issue,) I am prepared to protest against his conclusion.

To test fairly the soundness of the orthodox argument, I will simply apply the terms of the proposition to actual circumstances in real life. I will imagine that a report that a man was raised from the dead yesterday, at Hampstead or at Highgate, was circulated to-day in the city of London. I will suppose the exact testimony assumed by Paley (though such I believe never was produced in attestation of a miracle) was really at hand in verification of the event, *i. e.* twelve honest witnesses who changed their lives from the moment they witnessed it, and who, rather than confess themselves deceived, were content to suffer torture and death. I will suppose this testimony and these witnesses fairly produced to twenty indifferent persons of sound minds taken indiscriminately from the streets of London, between Hyde Park corner and Whitechapel, and I contend that not one of them would believe the miracle on the evidence produced, or on any other evidence whatsoever; and this simply for the reason assigned by Hume, that every one of these persons would at once conclude that, as a question of probability, it was more likely that the witnesses should be deceivers or deceived, than that

the miracle should be true; and this natural conclusion would be founded on the general principle laid down by the philosopher that, whilst miracles are contrary to experience, the falsehood or the perversion of testimony are matters of almost daily occurrence*. A frivolous attempt to fasten upon Hume a logical inaccuracy in the use of the word "experience" will not succeed in mystifying the common sense of mankind.

I shall, lastly, allude briefly to the practical effect produced by a belief in miraculous agency on the moral character and the understanding, in reference to the development of those spiritual ethics which are, at least, the end and purpose of religious instruction. Have those who believed most of the outward and sensible miracles of the Scriptures been those best versed in the divine philosophy of Christ, or most deeply impressed with his spirit? Credulity and ignorance, persecution and corruption, are found to be the peculiar vices of the Church in those ages when God is thus assumed to have been in an especial manner present to it, and the amount of miracles in the Christian Church will ever be found in an inverse ratio to its spiritual

* The *quality* of human testimony to miraculous events may be estimated by the fact that thousands of persons of all ranks still believe in the wonder-working powers of the Holy Coat of Trêves, and of the "Ecce Homo" in the Petrus-Kirche, in the capital city of Munich; and, surely, it is natural to suppose that the people of Palestine, in the days of Moses or of Christ, were not less credulous than the people of Europe in the nineteenth century.

purity*. The object of religion is to "bring us nearer to God," by realizing the divine presence in the soul, and that incarnation of God in our flesh, of which Christ has furnished to mankind the brightest example in the history of the world. The miracles, by which the revelation of Christ is assumed to be illustrated, are supposed to have been, in darker ages, a means of converting a barbarous people; but to confound the faith in these supposed miracles with that higher faith in the teaching of Christ, to which they are said to have subserved, is, to say the least of it, to confound the means with the end.

A living faith in the ethics of Christianity, it will surely be conceded, is more important than a belief in the raising of Lazarus, or the possession of the swine; and if, by a not improbable change in religious opinion, these two miracles should be abandoned, as so many others have been by the advocates of the popular creed, how little would it affect the spiritual objects of our faith. The grand dogmas of the immortality of the soul—the progressive and heavenly tendency of the human spirit and its relation to God—the incarnation of God in Christ, our bright example (considered by Ullman as the very essence of Christianity)—the beauty of holiness and virtue the proper happiness of mankind—all these heavenly lessons would remain self-sufficing and

* Even the Gospel accounts of the miracles (which were no doubt generally collected from current reports) did not appear until a considerable time after the death of Christ.

indestructible, though every recorded miracle in the Gospels, and half the doctrines extorted from them by the Church, should be proved to be the offspring of oriental credulity and ecclesiastical corruption. Nay, more, how many thousands of human beings, in whose hearts the love of Christ, and reverence for his teaching, are warmly cherished, but who receive with sullen and stunned apprehension the miraculous history with which it is involved, would rejoice in the emancipation of their understandings and the liberty of reason *.

It is, however, after all, absurd to suppose that the miracles of the Scriptures are subjects of actual belief, either to the vulgar or the learned, and the very gravest of Christians are found occasionally to smile at the ass of Balaam and the voyage of Jonah; and even devout and learned bishops have had their joke at the grotesque superstitions they continue to inculcate. These things surely betray the absence of any honest, sincere, and earnest belief in the popular creed; and, beyond all question, the scepticism of the world is greatly on the increase. I repeat, that, even amongst the vulgar, the miracles of the Scriptures are not matters of devout belief in the nineteenth century, and that, long before another has passed over our heads, they will hold no higher place in the public mind than the spurious miracles of the Romish Church. It is not, and cannot be

* "But for the miracles," says Rousseau, "all the world would become Christians."

supposed, that converts to Christianity are nowadays made by appeals to the miracles or, indeed, to any other merely external testimony of its truth; and, therefore, a belief in miraculous agency must be preserved in the Church for the vindication of the historical accuracy of its documents. But, if its spiritual pretensions can be sustained by appealing to the Christian civilization of the world now in progress, and derived from the Divine power of its doctrines rationally interpreted, and the purity of its ethics, it is impossible to conceive the advantage of inculcating a belief in miracles as a condition of salvation. The external evidence, in short, of miracles, such as those of the Scriptures, is entirely useless for the support of what I shall venture to call the religious philosophy of Christ. The miracle of miracles in the Christian system is the existence of a divine spirit in man—the revelation of man as "the image of God." By this spirit we perceive all nature (before an impenetrable mystery) to be the miraculous evidence of the truth of God and the divine reality of life. True miracles, as distinguished from false, are those embodied in the "natural theologies" and "natural philosophies" of all ages. The vulgar of every period have eagerly asked for the outward "sign" in attestation of the inner reality. The true seer has "the witness in himself." The Syrian peasant and the idolatrous Arab were alike clamorous for these visible and abnormal manifestations of the Divine power; and, if the sacred story of their several creeds could be freed from the exaggerations

of oriental superstition, we should, no doubt, find that the Divine Founder of our Faith, and the Arabian prophet, alike repudiated the miraculous powers that were imputed to them. "If ye believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will ye believe though one were risen from the dead," are the recorded words of Christ; and, if they be literally true, they are utterly inconsistent with the truth of the recorded instances in the Gospels of the performance of this very miracle, for the very purpose (for which it is supposed to have been performed). The genius of Carlyle has rescued the fame of Mahomet from the charge of imposture, and it is clear that the prophet of Mecca made no pretensions whatever to miraculous powers; and yet, without the aid of these supernatural pretensions, the creed of Islam, by the force of a few vital truths, dimly discoverable through a vast mass of confusion, absurdity, and impurity, still continues the divine law for two hundred millions of human souls.

One word more, and I have done with the question of miracles. In discussing this matter, it has been my intention rather to review the state of the question, and to restate, with slight emendations, those commonplace arguments against miracles, which have been furnished, at different times, by the common sense of mankind, than to attempt to throw any new light on an exhausted subject. I

* See "Heroes and Hero Worship," Lect. II. Mahomet expressly disclaimed the power of working miracles.

have little doubt, however, that arguments against miracles, that had little weight with the laity of the last century, will wear a new aspect to the more enlightened mind of the present; and, though it is certain (as may be well supposed) that these arguments have been in all ages essentially the same, they may nevertheless assume a fresh importance under new conditions of human thought*.

The doctrine of prophecy may be properly discussed in connection with that of miracles, as both prophecy and miracle are assumed variations of the laws of nature, and involve a belief in what are called "particular providences." So vast a fabric of superstition has been erected on this latter foundation, that an examination of this portion of the existing religious philosophy forms a necessary part of a discussion of the popular creed. In glancing over the pages of ecclesiastical history, its darkest crimes and wildest fanaticism may be traced to this fruitful source of cruelty and persecution. The French Catholics of the 13th century devoutly believed themselves to be the specially appointed instruments of Heaven for stifling in blood the heresy of the Albigenses. We read of a solemn

* It will be seen that I do not admit the validity of the distinction made by Mr. Martineau between "philosophical and historical anti-supernaturalism" in reference to miracles (see the Preface to his "Rationale of Religious Inquiry"). I regard miracles as "per se incredible," in the sense in which they are received by the Church.

thanksgiving being offered up at Rome for the success of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. It was assumed that the infamous Charles IX. was the chosen instrument of the vengeance of God on his heretical subjects, as much as the Israelites of the Old Testament for the extermination of the Canaanitish nations. A century ago, the bloodiest wars that desolated Europe were frequently undertaken to gratify the ambition of a minister, or the caprices of a mistress. The wars of Louis XIV. (in whose character were united at once the ambition of the soldier and the saint) were alternately suggested by a barbarous love of conquest, and a hypocritical profession of "zeal for the honour of God;" and many of the wars of England have arisen from no purer motives. And yet the aisles of Notre-Dame and St. Paul's have resounded with thanksgiving for success in these detestable contests, and God has been impiously addressed as the "Lord of Hosts" and the captain of our armies.

The bowels of Wicliffe, according to the Romish historians, by a particular providence, "fell out" like those of Arius; the monks of the middle ages, by a singular poverty of invention, having assigned the same form of the manifestation of Divine vengeance on the founder of Arianism and our first Reformer. In the same spirit, the famine produced by political arrangements, (for the world is assuredly large and fruitful enough for us all,) and the pestilence caused by the neglect of cleanliness, are looked upon as special visitations of God. The

advance of civilization, and the improvement of our social condition and habits, have removed from the catalogue of human diseases in this country the sweating-sickness and the plague* which punished the filthiness of our forefathers; but superstition still clings even to the form of words which deprecated them as special punishments of God. In the reign of Elizabeth, the nobles of England were distinguished by domestic habits as disgusting and abominable as those of the most miserable and degraded of our present peasantry, and they are represented as moving from seat to seat to avoid the filth that rotted on their rush-covered floors. In our own times, the regular visitation of typhoid disease in particular localities has been clearly traced to the dirty habits of their inhabitants, and the neglect of drainage. Cleanliness has been introduced, and the disease has disappeared; and surely disease which can be traced to these simple and natural causes can only be referred by the grossest superstition to the special interference of divine Providence. It is true, indeed, that God punishes us by the infliction of diseases for the neglect of those general laws which He has ordained for the government of the universe. The drunkard

* "To *all natural evils*," says Dr. Rush, in the able "Report of the Board of Health," just published, "the Author of Nature has kindly prepared an antidote. Pestilential fevers furnish no exception to the remark. The means of preventing them are as much under the power of human reason and industry as the means of preventing the evils of lightning and common fire."

who dies of a diseased liver is in no other sense, I suppose, the object of a particular providence, than as being destroyed by the violation of those moral and organic laws which the providence of God has established as the conditions of life and health. It would be as rational to ascribe to a particular providence the headache that follows an act of gluttony or of drunkenness as to assume any other supposition.

And yet, if we apply the principle I have laid down to every other case in which these special providences are supposed, we shall find it as truly, though not always so palpably, applicable. I assert the truism, that God governs the world by universal laws. He has established the physical law, which renders the use of certain foods and drinks (and of all in excess) destructive of human health, and tending to destroy the human frame. This is a simple matter of natural chemistry (if I may so speak), every substance in nature having an action favourable or unfavourable on every other with which it is combined. Now it does not certainly follow that every individual shall actually die in consequence of his *own* excess; (for it is possible, and perhaps I ought to say it is natural, that some should die of old age,) but it does follow that life is prolonged or shortened in exact proportion to our observance of those organic laws which regulate our health. Many men, it may be said, come into the world with ready-made diseases, or with tendencies to disease inherited from unhealthy parents, or even

from remote ancestors; but still the unhealthiness, whether it be traced to this generation or to a remote one, was originally produced by a non-observance of physical laws, and it was by a violation of a general and not by the introduction of any particular law that it was originally produced. It is thus, and thus only, that the sins of the father are visited upon his children.

The believers in particular providences must, and in fact do, constitute themselves the only judges of whatever imaginary anomalies they may discover in the order of the world. All great events in history are, in their eyes, so many wondrous deviations from the laws of nature. The remark of Dugald Stewart, in his "Philosophy of the Human Mind," as to the *cause* of the invention of printing, may be more reasonably applied to these apparent abnormities in the history of the world. The invention of printing, he says, must be rather considered "as the result of those *general causes* on which the progress of society seems to depend, than the mere effect of a fortunate accident." To the profound and inquiring mind of Carlyle it is rather a matter of surprise that so simple a mechanical contrivance should not have been *earlier* supplied to the pressing need of mankind.

The connection of cause and effect is as clearly traceable in the moral as in the material world, and is equally evident in the production of illustrious men and great revolutions in human affairs. The fanatic may assume that Napoleon was a scourge

in the hands of God for the punishment of revolutionary and infidel France, but the philosophical historian will discover, in the fortunes of the illustrious Corsican, the necessary and inevitable consequence of the events which preceded his career.

There are (to speak strictly) no accidents or anomalies in the economy either of the material or of the moral world, and the triumphs of the hero and the sage are as much the consequence of preceding causes as the chemical changes of natural bodies are the results of the laws of matter. Luther was not specially raised up by God for the reformation of Christendom, but was stung into heroism by the corruption by which he was surrounded, and the persecution which he endured. The immediate cause of the reformation in Germany was the sale of indulgences—a more remote one, the ambition of Leo X.—a still more remote one, the general corruption of the Church; and thus we may go back to the Nicene, or even to the Apostolic age—but where are we *specially* to recognise the finger of God in a Reformation as yet confessedly incomplete?

In the report of the debates of the House of Lords (January 29, 1847), Lord Brougham quoted a letter (written to Lord Robert Grosvenor by Mr. H. Hoare) in which the famine in Ireland is declared to have been a manifestation of the Divine wrath upon the nation for endowing the College of Maynooth! But it seems entirely to have been forgotten that the judgment of God, if such it was,

had actually fallen, not on the guilty English who had conceded the grant, but upon the innocent Irish who had received it! And Lord Clarendon, in the same debate, somewhat drily observed, that the Highlanders of Scotland, who had most vigorously protested against the grant, were involved in the common calamity. It is to be presumed that the Bench of Bishops, who remained mute on the occasion, were not prepared to answer this simple refutation of the popular doctrine.

It must, indeed, be acknowledged, that the advancing intelligence of the age is gradually pushing into the background those supplications for particular blessings (for rain for instance, or for fine weather), and those deprecations of special visitations, which are still retained in our popular manuals of devotion. The common sense of the most illiterate is naturally revolted at the idea of asking a special blessing for himself, from a just and merciful God, which may be a special evil to a large portion of his fellow-creatures. The cultivator of a wet farm may be as anxious for dry weather as the cultivator of a dry one for rain; but his sense of natural justice must recoil at the idea of asking for the special interference of God under such circumstances. A juster conception of the divine benevolence will teach us that nothing can be good for the individual which is not good for the species, and a reverential belief in the Divine wisdom would lead us rather to bend in awful submission to its decrees than querulously to supplicate its amendment in our

behalf. We smile, in derision, at the superstition of the Chinese, who sacrifice on the altar of the "Black Dragon" to obtain the blessing of fair weather, and yet a similar superstition is, at the present moment, current in England.

It may alarm the false religious sentiment of the age thus to lay down the natural and rational principle, upon which alone it is lawful to interpret the economy of Divine Providence. The popular notion is directly at variance with every instinct of right reason and natural justice, and the whole Faith of Christendom is based on the assumption of continual variations in the order of the Divine Government, in accommodation to human wants and desires. Though order and regularity are clearly discernible in the general economy of the universe, an exception is always assumed in favour of man and his concerns. A clearer apprehension of the teaching of Christ will lead to a sounder philosophy. Though "the hairs of our head are all numbered," and though "a sparrow does not fall to the ground" without the knowledge of God, it by no means follows that the Divine Power is specially manifested in these humble events. It is rather to be concluded that the Divine Government, being perfect in all its parts, and absolute in all its decrees, should be founded on an unbroken chain of causes and effects.

But, by attacking the received notion of "particular providences," it has been said that we overthrow the whole doctrine of prayer, and this requires

a passing explanation. Let us look at the rational purpose and object of prayer. Is it to induce God to reconsider his providence, in obedience to our ignorant desires and petty wants, and to alter his laws in conformity to our paltry affairs? This must be a delusion; for millions of prayers are daily offered up, in this spirit, for the most impossible and conflicting objects. The English at St. Paul's, and the French at Notre Dame, may, at the same moment, during a bloody war, be supplicating the same God for the success of their armies*; but both prayers could not be answered, as both could not triumph. And this is no extreme case. Our general prayers, though not so bloody and detestable as these, are often as foolish, as impious, and as unjust. They are foolish, as contradicting themselves, for (prayer-book in hand) we pray at one moment for triumph over our enemies, and the next lisp the sentiments of the purest benevolence.

The model prayer of Christ has been adduced as proving the lawfulness and necessity of particular prayers, but a rational examination of that beautiful prayer will tend directly to a different conclusion. The petitions contained in the "Lord's Prayer" are rather for those common and natural blessings that flow from the established order of Divine law than for any signal and irregular manifestations of his benevolence, commencing, as it does, with the

* How much the gentle and holy spirit of Law was revolted at such prayers as these may be seen in the "Collection of his Letters," Letter No. 3.

sublime recognition of the paternal relation of God to *all* his creatures. Such a prayer must be regarded rather as a general recognition of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, and an exercise of *faith* in his eternal decrees, than as a supplication for particular blessings. Any other construction of it is utterly inconsistent with those feelings of humility and resignation which are the leading principles of the Christian philosophy.

Now the doctrine of *prophecy*, like that of miracles, is directly at variance with the theory of Providence I have endeavoured to establish; and, moreover, from the *vagueness* of its pretensions, and the frequent impossibility of submitting it to the tests of reason and experience, it has a still firmer hold on the credulity of mankind. Some remarkable fulfilments of predictions contained in the Old Testament, and some ingenious adaptations of the mysterious language of the Jewish prophets to subsequent events, have been sufficient to establish the faith of the Church in the gift of prophecy. The predictions in the Old Testament of the dispersion and sufferings of the Jewish nation are said, indeed, to have produced the conversion of a celebrated French infidel in the last century. But surely the religious, political, and social institutions of the Jews sufficiently account for their isolation amongst the nations, the preservation of their national characteristics, and their continual persecution in barbarous ages. When their prophets accompanied them into captivity, and first beheld the

different institutions of the mighty nations that were contending for the mastery of the world, they might foretel, without any miraculous foresight, what must be the future fortunes of their unsocial and unbending countrymen. That the national character of the Jewish people is the real cause of the reception they have met with in the world is sufficiently proved by the charge of an unsocial and contemptuous dislike of other nations, which has been brought against them both in ancient and modern times. And we find that, as these national characteristics gradually disappear under the influence of civilization, the Jews of every nation in Europe are being admitted into the full rights of citizenship; and probably, before these pages have passed through the press, they may have even become legislators in Christian England.

In discussing this question of prophecy, it is necessary to distinguish between the far-seeing insight of genius, and the supernatural pretensions of empyricism. What, in the first sense, was the "Novum Organum" of Bacon but a prophecy the most distinct, and which has been partially fulfilled in the present condition of science, and will no doubt be still farther verified in its future fortunes? The deep political insight of Bonaparte enabled him to prophesy at St. Helena the destruction of the old Bourbon dynasty, the succession of the Orleans branch, and the final establishment of a Republic—events which have literally been accomplished before our eyes. Entirely original minds

are so rare in the world, occurring only here and there in the lapse of centuries, that the frivolous and unthinking portion of mankind is apt to regard all true insight into nature as a miraculous gift. Each succeeding age has beheld the fulfilment of the "prophecies" of Bacon—"man gradually establishing his reign in the interpretation of nature." There cannot be a doubt that the wonders of modern mechanics all appeared "in vision" to the soul of Verulam, and, for many ages yet to come, the world will be employed in translating his thought into life. He who revealed to us "the power and empire of mankind over the universe"—the triumph of man over nature—is surely, in some sense, to be regarded in the light of a Prophet and a Seer.

Every department of human knowledge and enterprise has had its Seers and its Prophets. To the dim vision of the ancient world the Earth was a plain, and all beyond the "Pillars of Hercules," or at most the "ultima Thule," a dream of romance*. A Genoese sailor, in a dark age, is suddenly inspired with a clear faith in the existence of another world, beyond these stormy barriers, that had, hitherto,

* "Seneca, the tragedian," says Lord Bacon, "hath these verses:"

> . . . . . "'Venient annis
> Sæcula seris, quibus Oceanus
> Vincula rerum laxet, et ingens
> Pateat tellus, Tiphysque *novos*
> *Detegat orbes;* nec sit terris
> Ultima Thule.'"

This is called by Bacon "a *prophecy* of the discovery of America." See "Essays," chapter "Of Prophecies."

checked the progress of man. He carries his "painful secret" from Court to Court, to solicit the aid of the rulers of the Earth, to enlarge its boundary, and is everywhere met with coldness and neglect. "Paper books" and political economists were everywhere at hand to *prove* his geographical ignorance, and the unprofitableness of the adventure. At length the necessary means are wrung from the Spanish Court, and then neither stormy seas nor angry skies, nor mutinous crews, for a moment daunted the "prophetic soul" of the joyous navigator. Like the Israelites in the desert, he is heavenled to the "land of promise," and is not "disobedient to the heavenly vision." Neither opposing nature, nor the faithlessness of man, were able for a moment to obscure his faith in his invisible world, until the sudden and joyful cry of "Land! Land!" refuted the wisdom of the world, and vindicated the inspiration of the prophet. The soul of Columbus was burdened with a material vision, whose vastness and reality may be estimated by considering the exulting fortunes of America. Higher natures will prophesy a yet undiscovered futurity in the moral fortunes of mankind.

Was not *Puritanism* and all its fortunes foretold to the soul of Wicliffe? What else sustained him in his struggle against "principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of the world," and enabled a poor and despised, but true-hearted and single-minded monk, to triumph over the learned, the polished, the wealthy, and the powerful? Of

all our Reformers, this man had the clearest apprehension of his great work, and saw its true Catholicity, as the harbinger at once of political and religious regeneration. The Lollards were, beyond doubt, the spiritual ancestors of those "Pilgrim Fathers" who fled in after-ages from the persecutions of the Church and of the state, and founded in the American forests a free commonwealth under the shadow of the Cross. Again, did not Knox and Luther see clearly, though afar off, in prophetic vision, the great futurity of Protestantism that was to shake the foundations of human faith throughout the civilized world? A true Faith in the righteousness of God, a devout reliance on His providence, a belief in the inspiration of conscience, and the "truth of principles," was the real "armour of God" that enabled these men to walk unharmed amidst the fierce broils and savage persecutions of their age, and to "persevere unto the end." It is thus that the true-hearted and sincere man so often passes through the flames of human passions which consume the timid and the faithless, and comes out of the fire like the diamond from the white heat, uninjured and unstained. It is thus, and thus only, that men may be said "to walk by faith, and not by sight."

The "prophecy" of Christ of the destruction of Jerusalem, recorded by St. Matthew, may be interpreted as a simple instance of political foresight into an event extremely probable in the existing condition of his country; and the same may be said

generally of the predictions of the earlier Jewish prophets respecting the probable fortunes of their nation. The prophecies of the advent of Christ at a particular period, when stripped of the ingenious explanations, forced constructions, and subtle spirit of adaptation displayed by critics and commentators, are nothing more than instances of speculative expectation of those reformations of society which the periodical appearance of men of genius, after long periods of corruption, always render probable in the history of nations. It must not be forgotten, moreover, that the *failures* of prophetical predictions, like those of empyrical remedies, are entirely forgotten and disregarded, whilst the coincidences of fulfilment and cure are superstitiously remembered*.

The predictions of the Jewish prophets are generally conveyed in the figurative language of allegory and poetry, and thus a wide field is left for the ingenuity of "accommodation." The vast amount of fallacious exposition that has, in the course of ages, illustrated the "Revelations of St. John" (a writer whose spiritual character appears strongly to have resembled that of Swedenborg) furnishes abundant evidence of the facility of accommodation and the credulity of believers; and I

* For a vindication of this mode of interpreting general prophecies see Bacon's "Essays" under that head. That Bacon should disclaim the application of his theory to what he calls "divine prophecies," was a very natural concession to the superstitious character of his age.

verily believe that the poems of Ossian, if submitted to a similar treatment at the hands of the learned, might be made to describe, in prophetic prediction, the future condition of the Church to the end of time. There have been found writers, in every age, predicting from these writings, with minute accuracy, the exact period of the reign of the saints and the termination of the world; and a thousand failures have not yet damped the ardour of fanaticism. In Germany, and, I believe, in some other countries, it was found necessary to pass severe laws to check the progress of these false prophecies, which had produced a serious disorganization of society, and greatly impaired the value of property.

The common rules, adopted by the Church in the interpretation of prophecy, render it extremely easy to give the necessary colour to any historical prediction, and to torture it into conformity with the events it is supposed to foretell. The following "canons" for the interpretation of prophecy, contained in the popular work of Horne*, will sufficiently explain my meaning:—"The words and phrases of a prophecy must be explained where they are obscure; if they be *very* intricate, every single *word* should be expounded." (It will naturally be asked, by whom, and by what authority; for Mr. Horne, I fancy, does not believe in "Apostolical

* See Horne's "Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures," chap. iv.

succession.") Again, "By images borrowed from the natural world, the prophets often understand something in the world politic. Thus the sun, moon, stars, and heavenly bodies denote kings, queens, rulers, and persons in great power; and the increase of splendour in those luminaries denotes increase of prosperity. On the other hand, their darkening, setting or falling, signifies a reverse of fortune, or the entire destruction of the potentate or kingdom to which they refer."

Now, though I am not disposed to deny that the Eastern poets and prophets may have thus symbolized their rulers (for such is still the custom in the East), it is easy to perceive the latitude of interpretation that must arise from conceding the principle to the extent assumed by the Church. It would be absurd to suppose that *every* Eastern prophet and poet (for the terms are really synonymous), who apostrophized the rising or setting sun, was prophesying the rise and fall of empires; and yet it must be extremely difficult to discriminate between what are now called by the popular names of poetry and prophecy.

"The Prophets," says another canon, "often change both persons and tenses; sometimes speaking in their own persons, at other times representing God, his people or their enemies, as respectively speaking, and without noticing the change of persons." This may be critically true; but the expounders of prophecy are rarely critics, and the difficulties of grammar have often been found

extremely perplexing, even to those who contend for a literal and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.

"The same prophecies have frequently a double meaning," we are told, "and refer to different events—the one near, the other remote—the one temporal, the other spiritual or perhaps eternal. The prophets thus having several events in view, their expressions may be partly applicable to one and partly to another," &c., &c. It is impossible to conceive a principle of interpretation more vague than is suggested by this curious passage. It simply amounts to this, that, if the fulfilment of the prophecy is not verified by one event, it must be applied to another—if it is not realized in the occurrence of *any* temporal event, we must look for its accomplishment in some "spiritual perhaps eternal" consummation. Again, "Predictions denouncing judgments *to come* do not in themselves speak the absolute *futurity* of the event, but only declare what is to be *expected* by the persons to whom they are made, and what will certainly come to pass, unless God in his mercy interpose between the threatening and the event." Surely we need no prophet to tell us this! As far as it is possible to make sense of this jumble of words, it announces the truism (as being the occasional burden of prophecy) that God will punish us for our sins—if he does not pardon us!

It is directly assumed by this writer, that "where the prophets describe a golden age of felicity they

clearly foretell the Gospel times;" and yet, unless all history is entirely false, the gospel times were times of national misery, degradation, and persecution to the Jewish people!

The great difference of opinion amongst men of equal learning and sincerity as to the fulfilment even of the most remarkable Prophecies is a clear proof of the insecurity of the ground on which it rests. Even admitting, for instance, the authenticity of the two first Chapters of Matthew, in which he records the conception of the Virgin, and the birth of Christ, as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, the application has been considered doubtful by many orthodox modern commentators; Grotius, Hammond, Le Clerc, and a host of others, contending that this prophecy was fulfilled in the days of Ahab. Other commentators have referred the fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel (the "seventy weeks") to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. Grotius and Stillingfleet assume the prophecy in the Pentateuch ("a Prophet will the Lord God raise up unto thee like unto me") to be nothing more than a general promise of a line of prophets to the Jewish nation.

We have, confessedly, lost the rules which guided the Apostles in applying the prophecies of the Old Testament, and perhaps, considering the grievous errors into which they fell, we have little to regret. The difficulty of reconciling the often intractable materials of prophecy with the doctrines of the Church drove many of the Fathers, more especially

Origen, into an allegorical and mystical interpretation of the Old Testament. We have already heard of the "twofold sense"—Origen and Jerome boldly assumed the "threefold," and Augustin, not to be outdone, actually asserted the "fourfold sense" of the Jewish prophecies! Learned men are doubtful whether this mode of allegorizing Scripture had its origin from the Jews or from the heathen, but all are agreed in admitting the fact. It is true, indeed, that the earliest of the Fathers, and Whiston and some other modern writers, have repudiated all but the literal interpretation of prophecy in its primary sense. But Whiston, to establish his position, is obliged to assume the extensive corruption of the text of the Old Testament, which he admits, in its *present* condition, is *only* susceptible of an allegorical interpretation. A vast deal of curious and useless learning has been exhausted on this subject. Mystics and Enthusiasts, Jews and Papists, still rejoice in the "manifold interpretation" of prophecy, as being at once agreeable to the imagination, and as enabling them to pour the vials of Divine wrath on their religious adversaries; but the modern believer is gradually but surely emancipating himself from the trammels of this outrageous superstition.

The common definition of prophecy—"a prediction made by Divine inspiration" (if the idea of "inspiration" be confined within the limits I have elsewhere assigned it)—is by no means at variance with its philosophical acceptation. That God should foreshadow in the souls of the leading spirits of the

world that connection between causes and their remote effects, which the vulgar suppose to be the result of direct and immediate agency of God, has a strong natural probability. Indeed, this account of prophecy is perhaps more rational than a reference of its fulfilment in many remarkable instances to mere coincidence*; though, no doubt, mere coincidences are often assumed to be evidence of special manifestations of Divine power. When a prophet is said to be "raised up" (in the language of the Bible), it by no means follows that he is supernaturally produced, or that we are to conclude for the *special* agency of God. Thus, the "trees which the Lord hath planted" is a Hebraism to express those of natural growth, uncultivated by man; and in this sense alone is it said that the "Lord planted the cedars of Libanus," or "raised up a prophet" amongst His people.

He is undoubtedly a prophet who, by the force of direct and true insight into Nature, and the unwritten law of God in the heart, is able to rescue any portion of Divine truth from the neglect or proscription of a corrupt age. In this sense we cannot deny to Mahomet the rank assigned him by the greatest of modern seers†. He found his

* A most singular example of coincidence occurred a few years ago. An almanack-maker (Murphy, I believe,) foretold, in the autumn of one year, the very hottest day of the following summer. Thousands bought his almanacks, and some few possibly considered him a prophet.

† Thomas Carlyle.

nation idolaters, and left them the worshippers of One God; acknowledging, moreover, to a greater degree than any people the world has yet seen, the sublime and truly *Christian* doctrine of RESIGNATION *, which was, in fact, the corner-stone of the creed of Mecca. The gross corruptions of Mahomedanism cannot obscure the light of Divine truth that shines through them. These corruptions belong to the national character of the Arabs, which was shared by their prophet, and no creed has yet been promulgated in the world which has been altogether free from a similar perversion—though ONE appears almost to approach the ideal of Catholicity. The "wild justice" of the Bedouin is, however, in some degree compensated for by his generous hospitality, and his sensuality is balanced by his veneration for old age, and the inviolability of his plighted word. In Christian England, in the nineteenth century, the worship of wealth is a baser passion—as fatal to all true faith, and as deadly in its influence on the spiritual life, as the impurity of the harem, or the brigandage of the Desert.

Mahometanism was thus founded on two of the most profound convictions of the human soul—the doctrine of the Divine *unity*, and that of entire *resignation* to the Divine Will. By the first it is favourably contrasted with the idolatrous Tritheism of the fourth and fifth centuries, against which it specially protested. The grand simplicity of the

* "El Islam" is simply "RESIGNATION."

creed of Islam is far preferable to the sophistical refinements of the schools in those degenerate times, when all the realities of religion were lost in a haze of religious metaphysics. By asserting the second principle, of *resignation*, it is merely an echo of Christianity itself. It is the custom of Christian writers to represent the religion of Mahomet as a gross accommodation to the instincts of the senses, but in no age have Christians submitted to a ceremonial law more oppressive or to ordinances more self-denying than those observed by the disciples of Islam. The Moslem under a burning sun abstains from wine, and seven times a day the business and pleasure of life are interrupted by the duties of ablution and prayer. Even in the latitude allowed by Mahomet to the intercourse of the sexes, he reformed rather than corrupted the manners of his country, by reducing the number of wives and protecting the weaker sex. The sensuality of the Mahomedan paradise may be traced to the antiphysical doctrine of the resurrection of the *body* (for which he was not responsible); for the restoration of the body would be useless, without the exercise of its natural functions. Such appeals to the senses of the vulgar are common to all creeds, and Mahomet, so far from limiting his idea of Paradise to the enjoyments of the senses, expressly teaches that all sensual happiness will be despised and forgotten by those pure spirits who are admitted to the beatitude of the Divine Presence*.

* See Koran, cap. 2, 56 and 78.

The difference between those master-spirits, whom the world has, in all ages, delighted to honour as prophets of God, is a difference, simply, of degree. *One*, however, stands alone, and occupies a solitary pedestal in the centre of the world. The intelligence of modern times has agreed to recognise as the holiest and mightiest of its spiritual guides Him who, for eighteen centuries, has been the interpreter of the highest relations hitherto discovered between man and his Maker; who has opened a boundless futurity to the soul, disarmed the grave of its terrors, and given to a struggling world joy and peace in believing "the everlasting righteousness of God," "whose mercy is over *all* His works." Of all that has been hitherto taught in his name, a vast proportion, the offspring of ignorance and credulity, has been already abandoned; and the time is probably not far distant when we may expect a still further purification of our corrupted creed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

"Notions of *materialism* were mixed up with these theories. . . . . Such texts as 'I came forth from the Father'—'I proceeded from the Father,' were argued from as proofs that the Son was of the *same substance* with the Father."—Hampden's "Bampton Lectures," Lect. III.

I HAVE elsewhere noticed (in discussing the question of the inspiration of the Scriptures) the vagueness of the terms in which the leading doctrines of Christianity are embodied. The doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, simple as it appears, is enveloped in an almost equal degree of obscurity with the doctrine of inspiration. In a strictly philosophical sense, the worship of Christ as God is the worship of moral beauty, of which he furnished the highest ideal. The Divine spirit of Christianity furnishes a constant protest against that utilitarian and stoical spirit by which (with the exception of Platonism) all other ancient moral philosophies are distinguished. We find Christ everywhere asserting the claims of the beautiful and transcendental in

morals, in opposition to the cold letter of positive law. We find him violating the sabbath, plucking the ears of corn, and eating the shew-bread, expressly, as it were, to teach us the distinction between the spirit and the letter of his law, and to show us that "man doth not live by bread alone." And how profound and sublime is this legislation, for man, who is by nature both a lover and a worshipper!

In a primitive, barbarous, and credulous age, such as that of the Old Testament, it might naturally be said (in the figurative language of the East) of the inspired, heroic, and divine man (as it was said of Enoch), that he "walked with God;" or of Moses, that he "talked with God face to face;" or that he alone of all men had "looked upon God and lived." The same Divine privileges are asserted also for the Jewish prophets generally, by their rude and superstitious countrymen. The Jews in fact, and perhaps most other ancient nations, always entertained this idea of the heroes of their race, and, but for the fanatical and exaggerated expectations of the simple followers of Christ, would have, no doubt, allowed him also the rank of a true prophet. But the populace of the Gospel era appears to have entirely perverted the national and natural conception of the prophetical character and office, and, not content with assuming the communication of the Divine spirit to man, to have supposed that God himself, in a human form, had descended upon earth. They believed that

God was with them, not in a metaphorical, but in a literal sense, and that the human nature of Christ was changed into the Divine, not by the communication of heavenly gifts, but by a miraculous manifestation of God himself, in the form of a man. Perhaps this idea may be traced to the influence of the Paganism by which they were surrounded, and hence they gave to Christ the same kind of Divine and human personality that Homer had conferred on the deities of Olympus. Such an estimate of the character and office of Christ would naturally find favour with the Platonizing Fathers, who were deeply skilled in heathen learning*, and strongly tainted with the Pagan philosophy, as well as with the credulous populace of Judea. And thus it came to pass that, instead of the "essence of Christianity" being considered as "the union of the Divine and human nature in the person of Christ" (a rational and intelligible creed), it was assumed to be the transformation of Christ into God. The more philosophical Arians, who contended timidly against this fanatical corruption, were of course fiercely persecuted by the holders of the popular and established belief; and yet the heresy of Arius, variously interpreted, after the lapse of more than a thousand years, is still, openly or secretly, the creed of the great mass of philosophical Christians

* "That all souls were *consubstantial* with the Deity was an ancient Pythagorean notion which survived in the Church." Hampden's "Bampton Lectures," Lect. III.

throughout the world, and has, in modern times, been openly professed by some of the brightest ornaments of our literature, commencing with the illustrious Newton. The "taking of the manhood into God" is at once antiphysical and unphilosophical; but the taking of the Godhead into man realizes a spiritual idea, which appears to pervade all religious history, more especially that of the Hebrews. The communication of Himself to his chosen servants is the burden of the history of God's dealings with the Jewish prophets; but our popular idea of the Divinity of Christ is a semi-pagan superstition, at variance, moreover, with the general doctrine of spiritual influence as taught by all Christian Churches.

That God incarnates Himself in man is, in some sense, the common belief of Christians as well as of philosophers, and the charge of *anthropomorphism*, which has been brought against the Stoics, and against several of the Christian Fathers (more especially against Lactantius and Tertullian) in ancient times, and against Hobbes and Newton, and many others, amongst the moderns, is by no means opposed to the doctrine in Genesis, that "God created man in His own image," and in the case of the Christians was undoubtedly founded upon it.

They who have indolently received from tradition, and upon authority, the popular doctrine on this subject are little aware how much of the gracious influence of the holy philosophy of Christ, on the

heart and life, depends on a proper apprehension of his simple humanity. If we remove from our creed the merely *human* model presented for our imitation, there remains little but a metaphysical abstraction, too subtle to be applied to the common business of life, and entirely out of the pale of human sympathies. A weeping, a suffering, and a sympathizing *God* is not, and cannot, in strictness, be an object of faith. We sympathize with the tears shed over Jerusalem, because they were *human* tears. We sympathize with the agony of Gethsemane — the mockery of the judgment-hall, and the tortures of the cross, out of the depths of our own humanity. Our idea of God is purely metaphysical and transcendental; but we can conceive a being of our own race, richly endowed with the spirit of God, fulfilling the idea of "Emanuel" by the abundance of Divine grace, of which he is the great exemplar to mankind — the living proof of the ever-present Deity in the *human* soul. Such a being is at once comprehended by human reason, and adopted by human sympathy.

These are not merely speculative notions, but simple facts, to be observed in the common and every-day manifestations of religious feeling. The most fervent and zealous believers — they who trust most entirely to their religious emotions, and who are most removed from the influence of formal and regular devotion — are precisely those who most indulge in their orisons in the language of human affection. I am not here alluding merely to the

amatory hymns of the Moravians, or the semi-sexual and voluptuous raptures of the vulgar fanatic, but to the common language of devotion to be found in the offices of all Churches, and in the literature of every sect.

In asserting, then, the simple humanity of Christ, we by no means weaken his hold on human affection, but rather increase and confirm it. We do not displace him from the pedestal on which the devout love of civilised ages, or the adoration of barbarous ones, have combined to place him. We merely draw him within the pale of human sympathies—find him an *intelligible place in the natural world*, and present to the veneration of mankind a living reality, instead of an abstract idea. It excites no surprise to the philosophic mind to find that the ancient inhabitants of Palestine elevated the holy Jesus to the rank of a God, because the nations of the East have constantly deified the purest of their spiritual guides. A veneration for what is above us—the foundation of all "hero worship"—is, indeed, illustrated by all history, and acknowledged by all sound philosophy, as an element in human nature; but we may be allowed to suppose that the form of its manifestation will necessarily vary with the progress of civilisation, and that, whilst a barbarous age is found to worship and adore, a higher civilisation will be content to venerate and to love.

The profoundest thinkers of modern times—such as Novalis in Germany, Carlyle in England, Emerson in America, and others in different parts of the

world—the very flower of existing literature—men too, be it remembered, distinguished as much by the moral beauty of their lives as by the depth of their spiritual insight—are agreed in recognising the communication of the Divine spirit to the world, through the souls of its heroic men. "There is but one temple in the universe," says Novalis, "and that is the body of Man. Nothing is holier than that high form. Bending before men is a reverence done to this revelation in the flesh." "No nobler feeling," says Carlyle, "than this, of admiration for one higher than himself, dwells in the breast of man. It is to this hour, and at all hours, the vivifying influence in man's life. Religion, I find, stands upon it—not Paganism only, but far higher and truer religions—all religion hitherto known. Hero worship, heartfelt, prostrate admiration, submission, burning, boundless, for a noblest Godlike form of Man—is not this the germ of *Christianity* itself? The greatest of all heroes is *one* whom we do not name here. Let sacred silence meditate that sacred matter." * The sublime "Address" of Emerson to the divinity students at Boston, published with his "Orations," is an eloquent and profound vindication of the sacred priesthood of genius, of the office it has discharged, and must ever continue to discharge in the spiritual history of our race.

The "office of the priest," it is well written, is "coeval with the world." The only rational idea of

* See Carlyle's "Heroes and Hero Worship," Lect. I., page 17.

the office is that of a spiritual guide, distinguished above others for the divine power and beauty of his life*; and in this sense alone is Christ to be regarded as the "great High Priest of our profession." This was the gift that was said, in the glowing language of the East, to have "burnt like fire" in the bosom of Jeremiah, and which has sustained in every age the "glorious army of martyrs." The peculiar office of the priest is to inculcate a faith in the unseen and invisible world, and to teach the sacred mystery of the Divine life. It has been the fate of the priestly office to be constantly suspected and degraded, as all history bears witness. To the purest and holiest of priests it was said in bitter derision, "Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil," and to the most eloquent of his followers, "Too much learning doth make thee mad."

In the heathen Temple, as in the Romish Church of the middle ages, we find the priest degraded to the conjuror; and the authority originally conceded to the higher intellect, and purer vision, gradually transferred by the ignorant vulgar to the miracle-monger or the political Churchman; and, even amongst ourselves, the "imposition of hands" is assumed to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost. An office originally purely honorary has been degraded to a venal trade. In the Jewish temple, the "holy

* The word Priest in the primitive dialect of the East, according to Schlegel, denotes a man possessing that deep internal equanimity which is indispensably requisite to a perfect union with the Godhead. See "Philosophy of History," Lect. IV.

of holies"—in that of the heathen, the "innermost recesses," and, in the Christian Church, the place of the altar, have ever been sacred to the mummeries of superstition. The distinction between the "esoteric" and "exoteric" modes of instruction is at least as old as the days of Pythagoras, and probably as old as history itself. The ignorant vulgar of all times, given up to the life of the senses, have been deemed unworthy of direct instruction in spiritual things, and truth has only been conveyed to them in an allegorical, or symbolical, form. There was, probably, even in the teaching of Christ, a modified compliance with this universal principle of ancient instruction, for we find him teaching in parables to the multitude, what he afterwards explained privately to his disciples. The vulgar, however, of modern times are by no means in the same moral, social, or intellectual condition as the helots of Greece, the peasantry of Palestine, or the populace of Rome.

The brilliant imagination and profound learning of Gibbon, and the philosophical acumen of Hume, of Bolingbroke, and of Sträus, have, I think, alike failed to account for the singular *personal* power of Christ as a moral teacher. The man of learning and the utilitarian philosopher have overlooked the simple element of Divine faith and love, which approves itself to the secret instincts of the human heart. The secret lies too low in the scale of intellectual power to be apprehended by those who persist in seeking for spiritual dominion only in the

high places of philosophy. It was not by the power of *reason*, but by the charm of a transparent sincerity—an unfaltering Faith in the Divine word—and a true and tender love, that Elizabeth Fry was enabled to still the storm of blasphemy, riot, and obscenity that caused even the turnkeys of Newgate to stop their ears. No merely intellectual gifts, exhibited in her life and writings, will account for the command she exercised over the minds and hearts of men. The power was in herself—a part of her spiritual nature, and outwardly expressed in tones of tenderness, of earnestness, and of sincerity. In a few hours after her admission into the cells of Newgate, at that time the scenes of unutterable horrors, we find the half-naked and shameless outcasts of either sex transformed into sad and thoughtful listeners—sitting around their simple teacher "clothed and in their right mind"—the demons of lust, of violence, and of unbelief "cast out"—by no mightier power than "words of truth and soberness," uttered in the accents of faith and love.

All this was done by the force of *character*, rather than by the agency of the intellect. "Character," says Emerson, in one of those profound passages with which his writings abound, "is a natural power, like light, and heat, and all nature co-operates with it. The reason why we feel one man's presence and not another's is as simple as gravity. *Truth is the summit of being.* All individual natures stand in a scale, according to

the purity of this element in them. The will of the pure runs down from them into other natures, as water runs down from a higher into a lower vessel. This natural force is not to be withstood, any more than any other natural force." And again, he says, "The history of those gods and saints which the world has written, and then worshipped, are documents of character." Surely it is possible, without overstepping the boundaries of natural laws, to account for the overwhelming power that the strong, sincere and pure mind always exercises over the weak, the faithless, and the impure, and to discover the secret of those magical words, which, in a simpler age, caused men "to leave all and to follow." We greatly underrate the influence of these "unspeakable gifts" on the human heart; owing, no doubt, to their extreme rarity, and to the facility with which they are imitated by the hypocrite and the formalist.

The charm of a *perfect sincerity* is so rare in the world—the spiritual teacher is so generally tainted, more or less, with vanity, with worldliness, or with selfishness—the "spirit of the world" is so intolerant of all enthusiasm, and so suspicious of all zeal —that men have come to doubt of the reality of that Divine power which has so often changed the face of the world, and which, in all history, vindicates the presence of God in the human soul. But, after all, there is a deep-lying instinct within us, that enables us to "try the spirits" of our prophets, and man has not yet lost the faculty of recognising

the voice of God in his dealings with mankind. The partial success that often attends the conventional oratory of the pulpit, inspired by no true genius, warmed by no pure love, and sustained by no clear faith, may teach us the mighty possibilities of the real and divine. When the true Teacher appears, then it is that men's hearts converse together with a "most miraculous organ," even when the tongue stammers, and appears to the unbelieving of an "uncertain sound." The appearance of the true *seer* in the world is so rare, that (as in the present generation) men have come, for a time, to forget the model. Not once in a hundred years —often not once in many hundred years, does the human aloe put forth its gorgeous blossoms.

The Divinity of Christ is supported mainly by supposing him to have been endowed with two supernatural gifts:—first, the power of working outward miracles; and, secondly, with the faculty of "speaking as man never spake" before. The first of these suppositions I have elsewhere considered, and I have only to add that this supernatural gift is not, even on the testimony of the Church, peculiar to Christ, but shared with him by a considerable number of Prophets and Apostles. I have also discussed, incidentally, the second supposition, in tracing the connection of Christianity with Platonism*; and I have denied the *originality* of Christian ethics. What, then, remains to be con-

* See Chapter on "The Inspiration of the Scriptures."

sidered? I concede to Christ the highest inspiration hitherto granted to the prophets of God.

Inspiration, as applied to persons, is a somewhat more definite idea than as applied to writings, though, even here, the philosophical and popular notions are to a great degree at variance. The materials out of which the "inspired of the world" have ever been formed are a clear Faith, a pure sincerity, and a soul above *fear*. The Earl of Morton, when standing on the grave of Knox, pronounced his noblest epitaph, "*Here lies one who never feared the face of man!*"

But not only the body, but the soul of the prophet, must be above fear. His ear must despise the voice, as his flesh triumphs over the violence of man. Neither the powers of the world, nor the powers of darkness, were able to daunt the spirit of Luther. He believed in the personality of the devil—he saw him before his eyes, and he spat at him and defied him! Cromwell, inspired with the sublime idea of theocracy*, feared neither to face a king in the field, nor to condemn him on the judgment-seat.

The inspired man is one whose outward life derives all its radiance from the light within him. He walks through stony places by the light of his own soul, and stumbles not. As long as he appears like the sun above the horizon, he is the "observed of all observers" (though all *lookers on* are by no

* See Carlyle's "Heroes and Hero Worship," Lect. VI.

means *observers*), and, long after he is set, he leaves behind him a flood of glory that "fills the wide vessel of the universe." No human motive is present to such a mind in its highest exultation—no love of praise—no desire of fame— no affection, no passion mingles with the divine afflatus, which passes over without ruffling the soul. A man thus breathed upon by the Holy Spirit becomes the passive instrument of an overwhelming power. "The unwise doth not well consider this, and the fool doth not understand it."

If I am reminded that thousands of fanatics in all ages have assumed inspiration from their own deceitful emotions, who have been neither virtuous nor wise, I answer simply, that the absence of wisdom and virtue, and *enduring* power, was a sufficient proof of their delusion or the evidence of their hypocrisy. The existence of false prophets is not a presumption against the reality of the true, or Christians might argue against the probability of a Messiah from the delusions of Joanna Southcote. It would be far more just to argue, from the abundance of false prophets in the world, that it is the everlasting purpose of God to instruct and to regenerate it by analogous means.

The "philosophy of history" clearly indicates that the world is really governed by its prophets alone, and that the priests of virtue, of science, and of power, are the true arbiters of its destinies.

Statesmen are but the puppets of the *true* priesthood in every age. The essence of all history is

purely *spiritual*, and the politics of the world are but the reflection of its inner life. In exact proportion as the representative system of modern nations is developed by the progress of knowledge, in the same degree will the spiritual power of man be able to realize its office and destiny. The "village Hampdens and mute inglorious Miltons" of every nation will then become the visible, as they are now the real moving-springs of human life; and the laggard movements of cabinets will derive fresh vigour from a transfusion of the true life's blood of humanity. All this has clearly a tendency towards the establishment of a virtual theocracy; and in the dim future, and at a vast distance, the eye of the Seer may behold the realization of the dream of Cromwell—a nation "fearing God and loving one another."

The present incipient agitation to secure the peaceful commerce of nations, and mitigate the warlike propensities of mankind, is, at least, a concession to the pure spirit of Christian Ethics; and, however contemptuously the movement may be treated by those who confine the moral progress of mankind within the limits of political experience, we cannot forget that the abolition of slavery was once regarded by the same authorities as a crotchet of mistaken philanthropy. A gradual extension of Christian Ethics will doubtless follow the abandonment of the doctrinal corruptions with which they have been so long overlaid, and much of the evil now considered as the natural inheritance of man-

kind will disappear before a more enlightened apprehension of the Christian philosophy.

If we reflect on the wonderful difference between the highest and lowest, between the most pure and spiritual, and the most gross and sensual of human beings, even in a high state of civilization (and this was probably far greater in a state of barbarism), we shall not be at a loss to understand that "worship of genius" which pervades the history of mankind. It is the difference between the bright intuition of the soul looking deep into the realities of things, and the mere animal instinct of the senses. The true Seer, looking deep into causes, carries in his heart the simple wisdom of God. The secret harmonies of nature vibrate on his ear, and her fair proportions reveal themselves to his eye. He has a deep faith in the truth of God, and believes in ever buoyant hope, that "all things *will* work together for good to those that love Him." But this love of God is not "a rhapsody of words." He lives in it and has it in his heart. Many heroic souls are distinguished in history for the possession of some one or many of these gifts of the mind and graces of the heart, but none ever possessed so many, and in such a high degree, as the inspired teacher of Nazareth. It is said of him, that "he knew what was in man"—that he read the spiritual fortunes of our race—that he had penetrated that great mystery of nature, the human soul.

Ordinary minds either altogether distrust, or superstitiously exaggerate, the "fruits of the spirit."

We most of us come into the world and find the circuit of our thoughts already traced out for us by routine and authority. The preacher for ever complains that the world, in general, abandoned to the dominion of the senses, has little love and little desire for spiritual things—that men use the language and adopt the forms of devotion by habit and from tradition, and do not endeavour to sound the depths of their souls, to know "what manner of spirit they are of." But "truth," says Lord Bacon *, "is rightly called the daughter of *time*, and not of *authority;* and is it not wonderful," he asks, "that the bonds of antiquity, authority, and unanimity have so enchained the power of man, that he is unable (as if bewitched) to become familiar with *things* themselves," that is, to distinguish between what he elsewhere calls the "*idols*" of the human from the "*ideas* of the Divine mind?"

No wonder that the profound wisdom of Christ, drawn from the depths of his pure and heaven-taught spirit, should have entranced the simple and fascinated the learned, and that the world should have "hung enamoured" on his accents for eighteen hundred years. Philosophy itself must pardon the exaggerated rapture of his Eastern followers, who saw in him "all the fulness of the Godhead." When we read the simple story of his life (no doubt substantially authentic), so full of the power and beauty of truth—when we read of men occupied in

* See "Novum Organum," Aphorism 124.

the ordinary occupations of life "leaving all and following" him, moved only by a few "gracious words"—when we reflect on the Galilæan peasant overthrowing gradually, as has been said by Paley, all the altars in the civilized world, and furnishing, down to our own times, a truly Catholic creed for all nations, we can scarcely wonder that the majority of mankind should still continue to kneel before the Cross. It is in fact true, that all civilized men, not utterly debased by ignorance, or corrupted by vice, are really Christians, so far as the kind of Christianity offered them is consistent with the unwritten law of God in the heart—with such evidence as this of the Divine power and heavenly wisdom of Christ before our eyes, there is no need to vindicate his claim to the character of a prophet by the supposition of any outward miracles.

The character, then, in which Christ must and will be regarded, sooner or later, by the future intelligence of mankind, is simply that of the "foremost man in all the world" soaring far above all "principalities and powers"—above all philosophies hitherto known — above all creeds hitherto propagated in his name." He saw with the eye of Faith far deeper into the Divine law of the world than the eye of man had yet seen in his age, than the ear of man had yet heard, or his heart conceived; and man is even yet far from apprehending the expansive power of his religion*.

* See Archbishop Whately's "Kingdom of Christ," Essay II., p. 157.

He stood between the world of sense, and the "life of God," and thus was he the "Mediator between God and Man." And yet he must be strictly regarded as the restorer and not the creator of God's law. He came "not to destroy but to fulfil." He came to restore the down-trodden faith of man in the boundless possibilities of the human soul—to present in his life an enduring example of the "beauty of holiness," and to set his seal on the still struggling doctrine of immortality. There is not a sect of Christians in the world which does not recognise in these simple principles the *vital* elements of their creed. The minor differences (and these are what commonly produce the fierce wrangling of sectarianism) are to be sought for in the fine-drawn distinctions of speculative believers, and in the arrogant dogmatising of churches.

A glance at the present condition of religious philosophy amongst our German neighbours is sufficient to convince us of the utter futility of the attempt to bind the faith of mankind by dogmatical articles, by creeds and confessions. In seeking for the essential characteristics of Christianity, the generality of these writers assume that the "union of the Divine and human nature in the person of Christ" is its true foundation; and their differences are merely of *degree*, in the acceptation of the doctrine. Theoretically, there is really little difference between the orthodoxy of Ullman and the more philosophical liberality of Hegel. Ullman admits that, "in the whole circle of religious

thought, there is nothing more sublime than the consciousness in man of entire union with the Deity."* This leading idea, he admits, distinguishes Christianity from all other creeds; but he refines needlessly on the *mode* of its communication to man; *i. e.*, whether it be a matter of consciousness, or a *revealed fact*. Hegel regarded Christianity as the true, absolute, and self-evident religion, *because* it declares the union of God with man; and he attempted on this ground to reconcile religion and philosophy, and to show that, in their *highest results*, they were actually identical.

The distinction between a revealed fact, and one which enters the mind through the medium of the conscience, is too fine to be of any practical value. As Christ addressed mankind (by the admission of all sects) in the character of man ("perfect man" it may be), we may suppose that he would experience in himself, and appeal to in others, that consciousness which is the universal attribute of the species. If by a "revealed fact" is meant only one which is announced by audible voices from Heaven, or conferred by the descent of "cloven tongues of fire," the distinction is plain enough; but we can hardly conclude that this is the meaning of the learned German. The simple question after all is this: whether Christ instructed mankind by natural or by supernatural means,—the former being confessedly sufficient. Hegel asserts

* See "Essence of Christianity," page 89 (Catholic Series).

that Man, *originally*, enjoyed a participation of the Divine nature (and surely this is consistent with the doctrine of Genesis), and that, at a certain stage of his development, he will again arrive at a knowledge of his true being. Christ was an example of this perfection of humanity; but his less-gifted followers in all ages have stood still to wonder at, and adore, this solitary example, without considering that this great "revelation of God in the flesh" was intended to announce the universal powers and privileges of the race.

There is one objection commonly urged against the humanity of Christ, founded on the assumption that, having himself declared his divinity, we cannot reconcile the contrary supposition with the acknowledged truth and holiness of his character. I am surprised that Ullman should have fallen into this common mistake. "Our only choice," he says, "is between the supposition of a visionary self-idolatry, in which case Christ can no longer remain to us a great pure-minded man, or a belief in the truth of the consciousness he expressed." To the first hypothesis the answer is—that the highest and purest minds are not only not generally free from, but are ordinarily distinguished by, a transcendental and visionary character in the best sense of these much perverted words. To the second hypothesis Ullman himself has furnished a sufficient answer in the undisputed admission that Christ ***had*** a "consciousness" (how-

ever derived, by natural or by supernatural means) "of what he expressed."

By the side of the assertion of Christ, "I and the Father are One" (which may be fairly interpreted as a general vindication of the Divine origin of man—the doctrine of Genesis), we should place those other texts which clearly declare his desire to impart his *divinity* to all his true followers. "That they all may be One, *as thou, Father, art in me;*" and again, "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in One;" or again, "All is yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Surely, these texts sufficiently indicate that the "divinity" of Christ was not an abnormal, but a natural gift, communicable to the whole race of man, and discovered in the pure depths of that heaven-instructed soul whose commission it was "to seek and to save *that which was lost*." It was, in fact, a revival of the half-forgotten faith of mankind in its immortal destinies. It is assumed, in the popular belief, that Christ actually realised in his person the *perfection*, both of the Divine and human natures; but the evidence of this is merely historical, and liable to the uncertainty that must always attach to human testimony. Of that which formed the corner-stone of his sublime creed, we have "the witness in ourselves," in the recognition by the conscience of "the divinity that stirs within us."

Dr. Whately has attempted* to distinguish be-

* See "Kingdom of Christ," Essay I., page 9.

tween the character assumed by Christ, and that currently given by the Jews to their national prophets; and the sophistical nature of his argument is a tolerable proof how little can be said, even by the most dexterous champions of orthodoxy, in favour of the popular notion of the divinity of Christ. First it is argued that Jesus is the "Son of God" in a different sense from all other prophets, because he is distinguished by the title of "only begotten," which, according to St. John, he conferred on himself.

We are told, however, by Dr. Hampden* that the epithet "only begotten" (*μονογενὴς* — the "unigenitus" of the Latin Fathers) is, more than once, applied to the universe (the *secondary* Divine being in the Platonic system) in the "Timæus" of Plato. A great variety of writers have noticed the Platonic character of St. John's gospel, as well as Dr. Hampden, who tells us, also, that so little were the schoolmen agreed about the nature of Christ that he was variously assumed to be "the Son of God" "by nature," by "necessity," "by will," "by predestination," and "by adoption."

But, supposing that St. John recorded, with the accuracy of a short-hand writer, the exact words of Christ more than half a century after they were uttered, surely this is but a very slight foundation for assuming the actual identity of God and Christ. Dr. Whately admits (what it is no longer possible

* See "Bampton Lectures," Lect. III.

to dispute) that the angel had promised to Mary that her son should be "*a* son of God," and not "*the* son of God" according to the common version, and that so far it was natural to expect in Jesus an ordinary prophet—inspired by *a* holy spirit, not *the* Holy Spirit, as we read in the received translation *.

But it is most singularly argued, that, from the circumstances attending the *transfiguration*, we are to assume a difference between Christ, and Moses, and Elias; because, on that occasion, the former was surrounded by a supernatural light; though, if we are to believe the history of the Old Testament, manifestations equally "supernatural" were actually vouchsafed to the other two! The only really distinctive feature in the transaction is the voice from Heaven (if this was not similar to that which had been heard by Moses) conferring on Jesus the title of "beloved," and requesting the witnesses especially to listen to him. Now, surely there is nothing in all this to distinguish Jesus from the other prophets of his nation, excepting, at most, that he was *more* favoured, *more* "beloved" of God, and *more* worthy of the attention of mankind. The difference, if any, is clearly one of degree, and not of quality.

Again, we find Dr. Whately assuming that, in whatever sense the populace of Judea understood the words of Christ, declaring his divinity, such

* See "Wakefield on Matthew," page 7 (quarto edition).

must have been the true meaning of his words, if he did not formally correct their mistake. But he seems to forget that the writings, recording these mistakes (if such they were), did not appear until long after the death of Christ, who had no opportunity of correcting the written errors of the Evangelists; and that, probably, these errors were the result of impressions that arose in their minds long after the death of their master. The enthusiasm of sorrow, and the tender recollection of the beloved teacher, would naturally raise, in Eastern imaginations, the feeling of affectionate reverence to that of actual adoration. But, on the supposition that the Evangelists misunderstood in this case, as they did in others, the oral instruction of Christ, it by no means follows that he could have corrected every mistake that had occurred to an enthusiastic multitude. I admit, however, that, as long as the world continues to believe in a *verbal* inspiration of the sacred Scriptures, it is impossible to answer this, or any other sophism, that may be urged by the critical ingenuity of Churchmen. There can be no end to controversy, whilst mere words are made the flexible instruments of dialectical display. We are indebted to Luther and his brother Reformers for thus making *philology* a vital element in the Christian Faith, and introducing an idolatrous worship of our sacred books *.

* See Novalis's "Christianity in Europe," page 15 (Catholic Series).

Again, it is argued, by the learned Archbishop, that, because Christ was accused on his trial before the council of making himself equal to God, he must have therefore publicly announced himself in that character to the people. This is literally to assume that the Jewish rabble that persecuted him were honest witnesses against him. Jesus, indeed, affirms his claim to be considered "the Son of God," no doubt, in the common acceptation of the words, and his persecutors might very naturally exaggerate this assumption into "making himself equal with God." The tendency of these witnesses to pervert his words is sufficiently manifest from their attempt to twist the words "Destroy this temple," &c., into "*I* am able to destroy this temple," which is noticed by Dr. Whately himself. The claim here made by Jesus, even admitting the literal accuracy of the Gospel accounts, is at most a very feeble and negative foundation for the inference it is sought to establish. The controversies, however, that for eighteen hundred years have divided the world, on the subject of the divinity of Christ, even amongst those who receive the same Scriptures, are a sufficient evidence of the many shades of difference that exist in the interpretation of the phrases of the Gospels.

Dr. Whately is obliged to admit that the Evangelists did frequently mistake the language of Christ, and that he sometimes permitted them to remain in their error, and yet (forgetting, I suppose, the import of his concession) he afterwards contends that this

would be inconsistent with the character of "an honest man." If the utmost that Dr. Whately assumes was sufficiently proved, viz., that the Jewish populace believed that Jesus had claimed to be "the Son of God" in a higher sense than the rest of their prophets, and that he himself admitted the charge, there still remains the difficulty of explaining the exact force of the language used, and the sense in which it was acknowledged; and yet, upon this doubtful issue, Dr. Whately declares, "that the truth of Christianity depends." In other words, the substantial truth of the divinest philosophy, and the most Catholic religion yet revealed to mankind, depends on the issue of a philological dispute!

It is insisted* that the divinity of Christ is to be assumed from his declaration that he came into the world to "bear witness to the truth;" but this has been the professed object of all true prophets from the beginning of the world. It is somewhat singular to find the orthodox champion (one of the most sophistical writers of the age) perpetually complaining of the "special pleading" of his opponents, who attempt to give a natural, instead of a supernatural, account of matters perfectly susceptible of such an interpretation. Arguments derived from plain human experience and common sense must, in the nature of things, be insufficient to prove the supernatural pretensions of Christ; and, therefore, if there be any "special

* "Kingdom of Christ," page 30.

pleading," it must be adopted by those who have to sustain the specialty of God and Christ being one Being, instead of Christ being a man divinely inspired by the spirit of God.

But, after all, is it not possible to conceive that Christ may really have thought himself "divine," without being liable to the charge of a "visionary self-idolatry," as urged by Ullman, or of conduct inconsistent with the character of an "honest man," as supposed by Dr. Whately? The wild sublimity of human emotion, when the rapt spirit first feels the throbbings of the divine afflatus—when the first dawn of Divine truth, and the first ray of Divine love, pour into the open soul, will at once explain and excuse the exulting language of the heaven-taught Galilæan. Man, "created in the image of God," and only "a little lower than the angels," may lawfully exult in the assured presence of that Divine spirit, which, according to the doctrine of Christ, is the lawful inheritance of "the pure in heart," and the communication of which his true disciples hope and pray for in their daily prayers. "A great soul,—any sincere soul, knows not *what* he is," says the true-hearted Carlyle*. They whose religion is founded on forms and phrases are no fit judges of the reali-

* Men inspired with new thought are like men filled "with new wine," and they who prophesy under its new-born influence have ever been liable to the "mockery" of the multitude, and have sometimes, perhaps, exaggerated their own inspiration. See Acts, chap. ii. verse 13.

ties of the spiritual life, and the sensual world has ever protested against or mistaken even the most natural of the higher impulses of the soul, and has either condemned as enthusiasts, or worshipped as gods, the most inspired of their race.

No doubt the actual union of the Divine with the human nature was realised in the consciousness of Christ. "The distinctive peculiarity of Christianity," says Ullman, "is this—that it reminds man of the divinity which dwells within him."

They who assume the divinity of Christ from the universal and abiding influence of his precepts may find a more natural solution of the phenomenon than in the supposition that God once, in the history of the world, descended upon earth, and perished as a malefactor by the hands of those he came to instruct.

In discussing the influences shed by the genius of Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, on their several eras, the eloquent Chateaubriand has truly observed that "Homer impregnated all antiquity;" that "Dante was the parent of modern Italy;" and that "England is now all Shakespeare." In estimating the effects on society of these "supreme masters," the accomplished Frenchman does full justice to the sacred ministry of genius. "Everything," he says, "springs from them—their impress is everywhere to be seen—they invent words and names that go to swell the general vocabulary of the people—their expressions become proverbs

—their fictitious persons are formed into real ones who have heirs and a lineage. They open up horizons from whence issue forth pencils of light —they sow ideas which are the germs of thousands of others—they furnish conceptions, subjects, and styles for all the arts—their works are the mines, the exhaustless treasures of the human mind. Such geniuses occupy the first rank—their immensity—their variety—their fertility—their originality cause them from the first to be regarded as LAWS, examples, moulds, types of different intelligences."*

How much more truly may all this be applied to the life and doctrine of the inspired Galilæan than to any other prophet that has yet appeared in the world, as the "Mediator" between God and the human soul! How have *his* words passed into the sacred proverbs of nations? How have the minutest and least significant passages in his shadowy history been magnified into deep and mysterious realities? How prolific have been the "ideas sown" by the imperfect records of his brief career? and how has that charmed and picturesque story "furnished conceptions, subjects, and styles for all the arts?" The whole civilised earth has groaned under the weight of a gorgeous Christian Architecture, and the walls of Christian temples have been covered thick with the masterpieces of the sister arts of sculpture and of painting. And

* See Chateaubriand's "Memoirs," vol. ii. part 3.

how has the simple and holy life of the Jewish peasant been regarded as the "*law*, the example, the mould, and the type for the highest intelligences" of all subsequent ages? In the same sense as Homer is said to have "impregnated all antiquity," and "England" to be "all Shakespeare," may Christ be said to have impregnated all ages, and the civilised world to be "all Christ."

CHAPTER V.

DOCTRINES AND ARTICLES.

"He who studies religion only intellectually loses sight of its vital principle. Its essentials are love and veneration—a deep pervading sense of dependence upon God, of communion with Him. Were religion only *doctrine*, it would be susceptible, like logic or mathematics, of exact demonstration."—ULLMAN.

WE are but following the footsteps of an accomplished Evangelical layman*, and of a learned English Bishop, in entering freely into a discussion of the doctrinal system of the Church. "The doctrinal statements of religious truth," says Dr. Hampden, "have their origin in the human intellect;" and in another place he observes that, "strictly to speak, in the Scripture itself there are no doctrines†." The author of "Ancient Christianity" naïvely complains of the absence of many of what are now considered the vital doctrines of Christianity from the patristic theology. There is probably no reason for disputing the accuracy of the liberal

* Isaac Taylor. See "Ancient Christianity."

† Dr. Hampden's "Bampton Lectures."

Churchman, or defending the orthodoxy of the ancient Church, at the expense of the modern. There is no doubt that the Christian theology was for many centuries interwoven with the Platonic philosophy. A union of the Platonic with the Christian system was openly attempted in the second century by Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, and Clement of Alexandria. Platonic notions were disseminated as Christian verities, and even the technical language of Platonism was employed by the Fathers in expounding the mysteries of the Christian faith*. It was not until the sixth century, according to Mosheim, that the influence of the modern or later Platonists declined in the Eastern Church, and in that of the West their doctrines are still to be traced as late as the *seventeenth*†.

The Christian Church appears for many centuries to have been the battle-field upon which the learned chivalry of the Aristotelian and Platonic schools contended with the weapons of philosophy for their conflicting views of Divine truth. This sort of connection between philosophy and religion is, in fact, found to pervade the whole course of ecclesiastical history. It has been well observed by a modern writer‡, "that changes and revolutions in the Church, if they are wide spread and lasting, are

* Since the publication of Gfrörer's "Origin of Christianity," the most bigoted must confess the influence of Alexandrian Platonism on the minds of the Evangelical writers.

† See article "Platonism," Ree's "Cyclopædia."

‡ See Hare's "Sermons on the Victory of Faith."

ever coincident with analogous revolutions in the history of the human mind;" and the fact is clearly proved by religious history, that the doctrines of Christianity have in every age been modified by the influence of the prevailing philosophy; and that the Christian faith has been enlightened and rational, or superstitious and fanatical, with the fluctuating fortunes of philosophical systems. The degradation of Christianity kept pace with the corruptions of the later Platonists, and the captious logic of Aristotle was the parent of a numerous offspring of doctrinal errors in the Christian Church*. The revival of learning was in some degree the revival of Christianity; but the regeneration of both was merely initiative, and the Christianity of the Reformation is in no degree in advance of the philosophy which then prevailed. The conflicting religious elements to be found in the faith of that period are to be attributed to the transition state of philosophy itself. In the "dark and middle ages," we find Christianity adapting itself to the motley spirit of the time, inspiring the fierce and bloody devotion of the Crusades, and leading the soldier of Christ through a pilgrimage of carnage, of plunder and debauchery, to the Holy Sepulchre.

* The works of Philo (which are proved by Gfrörer to have been written before the year 40) appear to have strongly influenced the minds and coloured the language of the Evangelical writers, if not of Christ himself. The whole idea of the *Logos* is evidently borrowed from Philo. See an able criticism on Gfrörer's "Origin of Christianity" in the sixteenth number of the "Prospective Review."

This evident connection of Christianity with the progress of human thought sufficiently proves that it is destined to "grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength;" and that so far is the Divine philosophy from being all comprehended "in the words of a book," that it is scattered broad-cast on the vast field of the intellectual universe.

At a very early period in Church history, we discover a philosophic liberality in the treatment of some of its main doctrines, even by professed believers, that would shock the orthodoxy of the nineteenth century. So early, indeed, had a profane philosophy corrupted the fountains of Divine truth, that it must be conceded that the earliest patristic opinion was in favour of the *corporeality* of the soul. Such was undoubtedly the opinion of Tertullian. Lactantius, the most eloquent of the Latin Fathers, is found early in the fourth century denying the "*personality of the Holy Ghost*," and the "*propitiatory sacrifice of Christ*." In short, almost every form of philosophical heresy that ever distracted the Christian Church may be found in the writings of the Fathers. It was the opinion of Sir James Macintosh, expressed in his "Progress of Ethical Philosophy," that the great doctrines of Christianity, those of *grace, predestination,* and *original sin*, were not older than the age of Augustin of Hippo! Dr. Priestley denies, as I have elsewhere observed, that the popular doctrine of the *atonement* is to be found either in the Jewish, Christian, or patristic writings, or in any ancient

summary of the faith of the Church. Surely, then, it is time to endeavour, with Dr. Hampden, to distinguish between the dogmatic theology of the Church, and the holy philosophy of Christ.

The doctrines of Christianity must be tested (and such assuredly will be their fate in the present age) by an application of them to the philosophy of our moral life; and those which conduce neither to our spiritual development nor moral progress must be rejected as the offspring of fanaticism or corruption. The trust of mankind in written revelations, and a dogmatic theology, arises from the universal desire of spiritual knowledge, combined with the want of courageous and sustained exertion in the pursuit of it—from our indolence, our sensuality—our want of faith in the powers and privileges of the soul. A written revelation is a "royal road" to the deepest mysteries of the spiritual life, it "tells our fortune" in the dim and visionary future—saves us the toil of thought, and enables us to depute to others the painful privileges of the intellect, which we want the courage and virtue to vindicate for ourselves. The indolent, the ignorant, and the sensual are ever distinguished for the extent of their *formal*, and the narrowness of their *real* belief. It is far easier, to those who have been systematically taught that there is both danger and difficulty in the exercise of the intellect, to believe in the teaching of the Church than in the direct inspiration of God.

But let us hope that the intellectual character of the present age will enable it to burst the bonds of

its spiritual slavery. Modern believers, I fancy, are but little disposed to emulate the pious zeal which once made men the "martyrs of a diphthong," and to sacrifice a rational and intelligible creed, sensibly affecting the conduct of life, for a philosophical abstraction. The days are gone by when fanatics, like D'Alva and Astorga, could find readers for forty-eight volumes on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception! It is, no doubt, beginning to be felt that many of those doctrinal distinctions that excite the strife and inspire the mutual hatred of contending sects are really non-essential to the vital character of the religion of Christ, even though they may have been the controversial battle-field of his immediate followers; and he who first exclaimed, "Not Paul, but Jesus," struck upon a chord whose vibrations will hereafter be felt by every rational Christian throughout the world.

With the exception, perhaps, of the Germans, the nations of Europe have little disposition to revive the metaphysical Christianity of the early Church. The "science of words," as the speculative theology of the East has been aptly defined, has but few charms for the utilitarian intellect of modern times. The progress and development of the inductive sciences have had an indirect and unsuspected but powerful influence in the formation of human opinion in every branch of mental philosophy. The speculative subtleties and doctrinal crotchets that once distracted the Church on the subject of the nature of

Christ*, or the personality of the Holy Ghost, are become matters rather of antiquarian curiosity than of serious interest to reflecting Christians; and they turn to these barren pages of ecclesiastical history rather to indulge a literary sentiment than to satisfy a religious doubt. A few minds, indeed, may still be found secluded in colleges, and professionally engaged in theological education, that make it a matter of conscience still to appeal to the ancient standards of orthodoxy; but the darkness, even of these modern cloisters, is occasionally illuminated by a ray of reason and common sense from the world without. The fierce intolerance of a Laud, or even of a Warburton, is no longer to be found amongst the most bigoted of churchmen, and the gentle and pious Law would now run no risk of being branded as an Atheist by a Protestant Bishop†. The practical believer in the present age is satisfied with spiritual *realities*. He is indifferent to the metaphysical distinctions that have amused the learned and puzzled the laity in the matter of spiritual gifts, and the teaching of conscience; whilst he finds the Romanist and the Quaker, the Calvinist and the Lutheran, the Wesleyan and the Socinian, all agreeing as to the spiritual *fact*, and asserting, under different

* The heresy of Nestorius, according to Gibbon, consisted in asserting that the manhood of Christ was "the robe, the instrument, and the tabernacle of his Godhead!"

† The charge of Atheism was actually brought by Warburton against the author of "The Spirit of Love!"

names, the existence of a Divine influence in the human soul. He feels that it is God alone that gives the spiritual desire that forms the essence of all rational religion—that theology is simply human. He is satisfied with the great dogma of his creed, that "God giveth to *all* men liberally of His Spirit," and turns with weariness and disgust from the learned limitations and scholastic refinements by which it is mystified and impaired.

The dogmas of the popular Christianity are, in general, a sophistical or a fanatical perversion of the universal moral instincts of mankind, and, in discussing them, we must endeavour to discover the philosophical roots from which they have sprung, removing the weeds with which they have been overgrown during their development in the hotbeds of ecclesiastical corruption. Every doctrine of the Church, in short, presents a twofold aspect—in its natural and non-natural—in its rational and ecclesiastical interpretation.

The doctrine of original sin may be considered as the corner-stone of the modern system of Christianity, as, with slight modifications and with the exception of a single sect, it is received by every denomination of Christians. Upon this dogma the whole existing theology of Christendom is based, and the doctrines of the atonement and vicarious sacrifice are inseparably interwoven with it wherever it is received. In its more rigid interpretation it assumes the utter depravity and moral helplessness of human nature, and in its most lax construction,

it concludes its inherent imperfection. It would be impossible, within any moderate limits, to examine the various interpretations that have been given at different times, and by different writers, of this perplexing doctrine, and I shall, therefore, only notice a few of the more prominent of these learned lucubrations.

Original sin is supposed generally to be either "inherent" or "imputed;" the former assuming that the corruption of mankind is propagated *by generation* from Adam, and precedes any actual transgression of the individual. Consistently with this theory, we find Malebranche discoursing learnedly on the theory of generation—the physiology of the brain, and the transmission of hereditary qualities from parents to children. Had he lived in modern times, he would have illustrated his physiological studies, no doubt, from the rich resources of phrenology, and, perhaps, assuming a "criminal brain" in the Old Adam as the consequence of the fall, have argued its natural transmission to his latest posterity*. The evident error that pervades the reasoning of the Church on this subject is founded on the assumption that our passions are simply *evil*, and not a necessary part of the machinery of our moral life, when reduced to obedience to our reason.

* The diseases of the father descend to his children in conformity with a physical law, and the diseases of the mind are evidently connected with those of the body. Thus the terms "choleric," "bilious," "sanguine," &c., &c., are used indifferently in physics and in morals.

It may be observed, however, that Malebranche in these curious speculations is but echoing the materialistic language of the Fathers on the same subject. Dr. Hampden tells us that Augustine maintained the transmission of the *material* element of corruption from Adam, and adds that the *heresy* of Pelagius was probably nothing more than an opposition to the materialistic theory that pervaded the scholastic theology, and which has been adopted by the modern Church. We are again and again assured that the Christian Fathers founded their *whole doctrinal system* on the principles of *materialism**. The very notion of Faith itself is that of an "infused principle," and the Apostle is described as "speaking in the terms of a logical philosophy," where he defines it as "the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen."

"Imputed original sin" simply imputes to the *innocent* posterity of Adam the consequences of his transgression, and, to cover the shocking injustice of this monstrous assumption, the Church has invented an imaginary covenant (the "covenant of works") made by God with Adam, and binding on his posterity yet unborn. The grossness and clumsiness of such an expedient to explain the dealings of a just and merciful God with a yet innocent world is worthy of the darkest ages of the Church; and yet this doctrine has been entertained by

* See "Bampton Lectures," Lect. V., and elsewhere.

Dr. Watts and a considerable number of learned Christians in modern times.

But let us turn from these barren speculations of ecclesiastics, to the simple teaching of reason and philosophy. The essence of the doctrine of human *imperfection* is recognised by every religious system the world has ever known, and is probably as old as philosophy itself. The ecclesiastical variety of it, we are now discussing, is a crude and imperfect apprehension of a great philosophical truth. The "æsthetic" view of the doctrine of human depravity is probably the revival of the most ancient philosophy on the subject, and is exactly in unison with every rational view of the teaching of Plato and of Paul. "To the honour of human nature," says Schiller*, "be it admitted that no man can sink so low as to prefer the bad only because it is bad; but every one without distinction would prefer the good because it is good, if it did not contingently exclude the agreeable and include the disagreeable. All immorality in actual life appears then to result from the collision of the good with the agreeable, or, what is the same thing, of the desires with the reason. * * * * The natural foe of morality is the sensuous impulse, or, in the words of

* See "Philosophical and Æsthetic Letters of Schiller," page 203 (Catholic Series). "Ce n'est point," says Rousseau, "parce que nous sommes *foibles*, mais parce que nous sommes *lâches*, que nos sens nous subjuguent toujours." How fatal, then, to morals must be all tampering with our faith in the power of the *Will*.

Paul, the 'flesh wars against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh,' so that we cannot do the things that we would."

In what sense, then, may we rationally assume the natural imperfection of the species? Man is in an imperfect and rudimentary condition in reference to the *whole* of his destinies; but absolutely perfect, like every other work of God, in regard to his present and immediate condition, as occupying a place in a system of moral *progress*. The bud is thus *imperfect* in reference to the flower, and the flower in reference to the fruit; but still the bud, the flower, and the fruit, are absolutely perfect in themselves, and fully satisfy the conditions of their being. The same law of development may be fairly applied to the intellectual and moral nature of man, and can be clearly traced in his spiritual history. The various stages through which the mind progresses, from the lowest animalism to the highest spirituality—from the grovellings of selfishness and impurity to the purest ideal of faith and love, represent the ordinary and natural developments of the moral nature. In the divine philosophy and holy life of Christ were presented to the world a model so sublime, that for nearly two thousand years it has paused to wonder and adore.

The apparently incurable depravity, then, of large masses of human beings arises from the absence of spiritual desire and the too powerful influence of the

senses *. Every form and variety of depravity is simply to be referred to these causes; and the master idea of Platonism, of Christianity, and of all other religious philosophy, has been to establish the dominion of the soul over the body, and to confirm the faith of mankind in the spiritual and unseen. A degree of corruption, or, more properly speaking, of perversion, has always been assumed by religious philosophy; and the object of asceticism and meditative devotion (however abused) has been to restore the balance of the moral and physical attributes of our nature. This is the simple theory of all religious systems, exhibited in the writings of the earlier and later Platonists, in the whole theosophy of the East, in the Christian, Pauline, and Patristic, theology — presenting every shade of purity and corruption—from the highest abstractions of philosophy, to the lowest depths of superstition, —from the pure and holy teaching of the "sermon on the mount," to the madness of the Egyptian monks, and the "torrents" of Madame de Guyon †. Religious systems only differ from each other in the *statement* of the doctrine, and the remedial measures by which it is sought to restore the æsthetic condition of the soul.

In spite, however, of the ecclesiastical perversions

* Schleiermacher defines our liberation from sin as the removal of that which disturbs the *unity between the material and spiritual life.*

† See Michelet's "Priests, Women, and Families."

of the doctrine before us, the philosophical idea upon which it is founded supplies the most important moral evidence of the immortality of the soul. The most perfect of mankind on looking back on the best-spent life is unable to discover a *finished work*. Life, in whatever light we regard it, is clearly a part, and not the whole, of our being. The soul has not slaked her thirst for knowledge, nor have the affections gratified their purest desires in the present life. Imaginary forms of more perfect being are familiar to the secret aspirations of the soul, whose hopes and desires are imperfectly satisfied by the formal dogmatizing of creeds. Thus do the very imperfections of our nature, as they are called,—our halting obedience, our sorrows, and our infirmities, tend to purify and exalt the soul, and raise it to the contemplation of its higher destiny. And who shall say that this was not the eternal purpose of God? It is, surely, more reasonable to suppose that the imperfections we discover in our moral being should be intended to stimulate our faith, and enliven our hope, of a happy immortality, than that our infirmities should be entailed upon us as a hereditary curse for the sin of Adam.

The scholastic doctrine of "original sin" is clearly at variance both with the spirit and the letter of the teaching of Christ himself; even should we succeed in torturing it out of the *philosophical* writings of St. Paul. He who exhorts us to strive for a perfection equal to the Divine Nature

itself, and proposes the innocence of childhood as the model for our imitation, cannot be supposed to have inculcated the despairing doctrine either of "imputed" or "inherent" depravity. The grand dogma of Christ—"Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" is a sublime philosophy for all time. And, surely, it is more consistent with every natural and rational notion of the nature of man, and the idea of spiritual progress, to teach the possible perfection, rather than the necessary imperfection, of human nature. Is the sincere love of the truth, and simple and unwavering faith, in the high purposes of the moral life, never to be rewarded with spiritual assurance?

But let us regard the influence of the popular doctrine of "original sin" on the development of the moral life in our various relations, civil and social. In every sense it is a "Gospel of despair," weakening the springs of all moral exertion, and checking the progress of human improvement. It destroys the faith of mankind in the *power of principles*, and tends to a base and cowardly conformity to the corruptions of the world. The sins, the sorrows, and the oppressions of mankind, are regarded as a necessary part of the Divine economy. It corrupts, at once, the public and the private conscience. It assumes, that the moral and social evils which are, in fact, gradually disappearing before the march of civilization, constitute the normal condition of the human race. If the political philosopher complains that, in the richest country in

the world, two millions of human beings are pining in workhouses, or living on public charity—that, in some shape or other, one-half the world have become the almoners of God's bounty for the other—that the luxurious and indolent classes are actually being destroyed by sensuality and abundance, as effectually as the poor are being decimated and degraded by the sufferings of poverty and the crimes of ignorance—he is reminded of the Divine revelation, that "the poor shall never cease out of the land," and that sorrow, sin, and shame, are the appointed inheritance of the sons of Adam. That the noblest institutions of public charity, anticipating almost every form of human suffering, abound and increase daily amongst us, concurrently with the increase of national distress—that the building of churches and the diffusion of (what is called) religious knowledge appear only to aggravate the pauperism and degradation of the people, ought, surely, to convince us that we are supplying neither to the body nor the soul the means of regeneration. If from ten thousand pulpits a body of educated men, whose proper business it is (for incomes varying from £30 to £30,000 a year) to extort from the Scriptures the doctrines of the Church, shall continue to teach us that we are "unable of *ourselves to help ourselves*," there is little doubt that they will "make the food they feed on."

But the private conscience is not less corrupted than the public one by the doctrine before us. If

we teach the drunkard or the liar that his vices belong to his nature—that they are "vices of the blood"—that his forefathers from the fall of Adam have been drunkards and liars, and that his successors will for ever inherit the undying curse,—is not such instruction more likely to sink the soul into an indolent acquiescence with an unavoidable fate, than to gird it up for sustained and vigorous exertion? That such is the actual result on the religious temper of the age can hardly be denied.

The primary instincts of the heart, and the original powers of the intellect, are constantly denied by the teachers of this debasing doctrine. The possibility of an abstract love of truth is denied or suspected; and even the natural affections are treated as objects of challenge and distrust. "The love of truth in fallen man," says Mr. Moseley, the late able editor of the "British Critic," "is a *corrupted affection*, just as natural love is; it betrays the selfish element; his mind annexes truth to itself, and not itself to truth; it considers truth as a kind of property—it wants the pride of making it its own; it treats it as an article of mental success." But is not this to confound the honesty of zeal and love with the miserable ambition of successful authorship; and must it not be the produce of a mind incapable of distinguishing between two utterly distinct and conflicting principles in the human heart? It will not surely be denied that a pure

love of truth may have animated even the "fallen" natures of many of that "noble army of martyrs" who, in different ages, have renounced and despised the common ambition of life, and triumphed even at the stake over the world and over the flesh.

Everywhere around us we hear from believers the mixed language of humility and arrogance, of presumption and despair; and they who most exult in the perfect soundness of their doctrinal faith are most ready, in whispering humbleness, to confess the feebleness of their religious obedience. It is true, indeed, that the knowledge and confession of error is the first step in the spiritual life, but it must still be regarded as a means and not as an end. The true confession of infirmity must not be magnified into merit, and strength and feebleness become convertible terms. Not only are the sincere and earnest misled by the subtle dogmatizing of the Church, but the vicious are made easy in their vices, and the feeble confirmed in their despair. The vicious man is easily reconciled to the burden of sins which he shares with all mankind, and the feeble sinks under the weight of infirmities he cannot avoid, and which he is taught to believe will cling to him like the deadly vest of Nessus.

Of course I shall be here reminded by the modern fanatic of the simple scripture, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" —as the great panacea by which all moral obliquities are cured, and which reconciles an imper-

fect obedience with religious assurance. But what is this but to substitute a faith partly historical and partly metaphysical (and which the mass of mankind must humbly receive on the authority of their teachers) for that faith in the *soul itself*, which is the incentive to all that is true and holy in the conduct of men, and which was, in fact, the very corner stone of the system of Christ? This faith in the boundless possibilities of the moral life has been the burden of all true prophets since the world began—inspiring alike the wisdom of Solomon and the spiritual raptures of Isaiah, of Christ, of John, and of Paul. In the prophetic vision of Isaiah, the future earth was to be "full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea;" nations were not to learn war any more; "the wolf was to dwell with the lamb, and the leopard to lie down with the kid;" and walking in "the light of the Lord," the emancipated world was to "become as a field which the Lord had blessed." In the sermon on the mount is shadowed forth the same moral ideal as the object of desire, of faith, and of hope. The purest (and to all but the apprehension of faith), the most impossible ethics are commanded, and the erring world is called back to the first principles of truth and love. The dead forms of ancient piety are condemned as having lost their significance by the lapse of time; and the formalist, the hypocrite, and the worldly-minded are rebuked for their indifference, their insincerity, and their *want*

of faith. Throughout the Evangelical writings, the same prospective ideal of moral perfection, as the object of life, is clearly to be traced, though often obscured by the influence of other philosophies which were prevalent in the age*. Indeed, the fanatical idea of an ever-approaching millennium, which appears never at any period to have been out of the contemplation of the Church, from the days of the fathers to the present moment, is the strongest possible proof that the desire and hope of this glorious consummation is inextricably interwoven with our spiritual history.

The faith, then, that "justifies" is not faith in human events long passed away, but in Divine instincts still throbbing in the human breast—faith in that fair idea of perfection that the Spirit of God reveals to us in our highest and purest moments. Unhappily, however, it has become almost impossible to define the office of this divine conscience in the modern systems of theology; for at one moment it is regarded as the voice of God speaking within us, and at another as the secret suggestion of the spirit of evil. And thus that "unspeakable gift" which has kindled every altar in the world has been made the theme of unhallowed criticism, and the sport of ecclesiastical systems.

We readily overlook the short-comings of the illustrious Luther, in expounding the doctrine of

* We are often obliged, with Dr. Hampden, to "appeal from Paul philosophizing to Paul preaching."

"*justification by faith*," for the sake of the eternal truths which are really brought to light in the "Commentary on the Galatians." In estimating the labours of the German Reformer, we must neither forget the temper of the man nor of the age in which he lived—his fierce enthusiasm or the spiritual corruption by which he was surrounded. *All faith*, either in the teaching of the conscience, or in the sublime philosophy of the Scriptures, had merged in a general belief in the infallibility of a Church, at once tyrannical, ignorant, and corrupt. It was natural, however, that the mind of Luther, trained in the school of religious obedience, and acknowledging the authority of "Catholic antiquity," should rather endeavour to accommodate truth to the Church, than to bring the Church into conformity with truth. The indignant protest of the man and the scholar did not and could not altogether suppress the natural instincts of a monk of the middle ages; and it is only to say that Luther was human, to assert that he was amenable to the religious and intellectual tendencies of his age. Erasmus has declared that Luther was anxious to restore the Church to the model reflected in the writings of the Fathers, and we have already sufficiently exposed the unsound character of the Patristic theology*.

* "Luther," says Novalis, "treated Christianity in an arbitrary manner; he mistook its spirit, and introduced another character and another religion; the holy all-availableness of the Bible, and thereby, alas! another foreign earthly science was mixed up with religious

The twofold aspect of the dogmas of the Church, their popular and philosophic meaning, is strongly exhibited in the history of the doctrine of predestination. It is extremely doubtful whether the true Calvinistic notion of predestination was ever really believed beyond the confines of ecclesiastical schools, or ever attained the rank of a settled doctrine with any important sect—still more doubtful whether it ever sensibly affected the lives of any considerable number of Christians. A few sophistical priests, a few simple fanatics, and a few voluptuous hypocrites may have held it, indeed, as a means for the exhibition of their ingenuity, or for the indulgence of their passions, but the common sense of mankind has always rejected it, as inconsistent with all rational ideas of a moral government of the world. The transition from the true to the false doctrine is easy to be understood, though the Church has been wrangling about it for at least fourteen centuries.

The Jansenists and the Jesuits, each claimed the authority of Augustin for their conflicting views of the doctrine of predestination. Now, Augustin appears simply to have taught that God had preordained, in the order of His providence, that the wicked should be punished in consequence of their sins against the divine law; a doctrine perfectly consistent with rational religion and sound philo-

matters—philology—whose destructive influence from that time has been but too manifest." See "Christianity or Europe," page 15 (Catholic Series).

sophy. But, for this, the fanatic has substituted the horrible notion, not only that the punishment but that the guilt was preordained—that, in short, the good and bad actions of men "are determined from all eternity by a Divine decree, and fixed by inevitable necessity." That many of the texts of Scripture relied on to prove this detestable doctrine are clearly to be interpreted as being (at least) relative to nations, and not to individuals, is now generally admitted; but the mysterious and obscure language of St. Paul leaves room for renewing the contest from age to age; and the author of the celebrated treatise on "Free Will"* has exhibited great powers of thought, a vigorous intellect, and much learning, in expounding this ecclesiastical crotchet. Of course the only cure for this elaborate trifling with the moral and spiritual concerns of mankind is a rational view of the *inspiration* of the Scriptures; for, as long as the popular notion is allowed to prevail, they furnish argumentative armour for all sects, and supply an unbounded field for the sophistries of schoolmen, and the sentimentalities of fanatics. Well may Dr. Hampden assert that the doctrines of the Church are simply matters of opinion; but he ought, surely, to have added, that it is unjust and tyrannical to enforce subscription not only by penalties, but by the slightest disabilities, religious or civil.

It is really humiliating to trace the painful

* Edwards "On the Freedom of the Will."

stages by which the minds of men have been freed (if they are even now free) from the *sacramental* superstitions. At this moment it is at least doubtful whether Luther (our great religious hero in the nineteenth century) did not believe, to the hour of his death, in the doctrine of the "real presence;" his brief conversation with Melancthon being the only circumstance that can excite any doubt about the matter; for, in his controversy with Zuinglius, Luther is found the violent and dogmatic assertor of this monstrous superstition.

Zuinglius, indeed, appears far to have exceeded the German Reformer in liberality of sentiment, and his belief in the final salvation of virtuous heathen, and of all those who were *strictly obedient to the law of conscience*, puts him on a level with the most tolerant of modern believers. In his controversy with Luther he was accused of entertaining heretical notions of "original sin," of the "efficacy of the divine word," and even of the "divinity of Christ"—a striking proof of the insecure and indefinite foundation upon which the Reformation was founded. It is probable that, in all I have written in these pages, I have done no more than feebly express the secret convictions of Zuinglius on these important subjects; and of which the terrors of the stake alone prevented the open profession. In reference to the doctrine of the Eucharist, the English Church is neither Lutheran nor Calvinistic, but I presume Zuinglian. The "spiritual presence" of Christ in the elements, which communicate a

divine virtue to the faithful recipient, *appears* to be the doctrine of her accredited expositions; but in this, as in all other cases of dogmatic assertion, the voice of the Church gives an "uncertain sound."

The doctrine of "justification by faith" was naturally considered by Luther as the vital principle of Christianity, as a belief in the efficacy of any system of teaching is the only rational ground upon which we can expect compliance with its precepts. The faith that justifies is that which actually produces a compliance with the pure dictates of conscience. This is the rational meaning of justification by faith, when translated from the language of scholasticism into the dialect of common sense. The philosophical idea of faith is that degree of certainty in the truth of principles that effectually influences the conduct of life, and even Luther, in his wildest enthusiasm, never altogether lost sight of this simple principle of belief; though it is occasionally obscured by the theological verbiage of his age. Fanaticism, using the language and the logic of the schools, even whilst protesting against them, has surrounded the doctrine of justification with the clouds of religious metaphysics.

The abhorrence of Luther for the *modern* schoolmen (for he was singularly tolerant of the ancient) appears to have disdained the decencies, and even the grammatical proprieties, of language; and we find him protesting against them in the combined dialects of Mrs. Malaprop and of Swift, as

"*sophistical locusts*, caterpillars, frogs, and lice."* The world is now far wiser than the Church, and the vital spirit of scholasticism is fast disappearing before the growing intelligence of the times. The triumph of Dr. Hampden is something more than a *party* triumph. The extreme antiquity of many doctrines supposed to be purely Christian is established by the researches of historians and philosophers. The modern believer will probably be startled to find the doctrine of the "new birth" amongst the leading tenets of Brahminical theology, side by side with that of transmigration, which itself may have been the foundation of the popish doctrine of purgatory. "The most honourable appellation of a Brahmin," says the learned and orthodox Schlegel, "is Ivija, that is to say, *regenerated*, or a *second time born*." "This appellation," he adds, "refers to that spiritual renovation, or second birth, of a life of purity, consecrated to God, in which consists the true calling of a Brahmin." †

On the subject of Divine grace, the schoolmen refined in all the exuberance of the scholastic terminology. "We hear," says Dr. Hampden, "of grace 'operating' and 'co-operating;' of grace 'preventing' and 'following;' of grace of 'congruity' and 'condignity;'" and he adds, "that the conception produced in the mind by these modes of speaking is erroneous;" and proceeds to trace them

* See Middleton's "Life of Luther."

† See "Philosophy of History," Lect. IV., page 156.

to the physical philosophy of "transmutation," and the "refined materialism of the ancient theological philosophy of nature," which "trembled on the verge of Pantheism!" *

The translation of this mystery of words into the language of common sense presents a tangible and intelligible idea to the mind. God has endowed us, "out of the riches of his grace," with faculties exactly appropriate to the work he requires from us. He has given us reason to distinguish the right, and a conscience to love it, together with absolute freedom of the will, to give significance to our choice. This *sentiment* of freedom alone is a sufficient answer to every theory by which the Divine justice has been impeached, by the wild fanaticism of predestinarians.

It is thus that theologians have invented a system of doctrines, and dignified, by the name of *Faith*, the acceptance of them by the mystified and superstitious laity. But what is, after all, the true Faith of a Christian? Both the doctrines and ethics of Christ are founded on the eternal basis of natural laws, when interpreted by the higher instincts of the conscience. Unless, for instance, a man is able to look upon death as the discharge of a natural function, he has not the faith insisted on by Christ; for that faith assures us of the victory over death and the grave. Unless a man believes that the providence of God is truly over all his

* See "Bampton Lectures," Lect. IV., 187, 191-2, 194.

works,—that all things work together for Divine ends and purposes,—that human life is a Divine thing despite its apparent perplexities and complications, and capable of a realization in beauty and holiness, he has no faith in the doctrine of Christ. The true believer is he who believes the inner revelations of the spirit, as surely as the outward evidence of the senses, and has *in himself* the "evidence of things not seen." The triumph of Faith is the triumph of the soul over the body, of spirit over matter, a doctrine common to Christianity and Platonism. The later Platonists, however, perverted the doctrine by a too great degradation of the body, which is nowhere chargeable on the philosophy of Christ, which nobly describes it as the "Temple of the Holy Ghost." The mortification of the body, so frequently insisted on in the Christian writings, and so grossly perverted by the immediate followers of Christ, was a corruption of enthusiastic disciples, who engrafted on the Christian doctrine the asceticism of Paganism. The miserable fanatics, and "pillar saints" of the Thebaid, were the natural offspring of this perverted teaching, and the regulation of the passions, and the laws of temperance, were confounded with the unnatural and demoralizing habits of celibacy and solitude.

It is thus that, in every age, the appointed guardians of the faith have been the instruments of its corruption, whenever they have attempted to legislate for the spiritual interests of mankind. A

dogmatic theology will ever be found either pernicious or inoperative,—pernicious, as tampering with the rights of conscience and the freedom of the will, or inoperative in its influence on the sincere and spiritual. The supreme power of Divine grace was equally insisted on by Robert Barclay and Thomas Aquinas. The "angelic doctor" and the unbaptized quaker literally agree on a vital question of Christian doctrine. It would be easy to multiply the instances of agreement between sincere and honest minds, professing nominally the most discordant creeds. The writings of Law are equally attractive to the sincere Unitarian and the orthodox Churchman. Such is the magical power of true and *Catholic* doctrine—such the charm of religious sincerity, which breaks down the flimsy barriers of creeds and confessions!

Have I not sufficiently proved that the voice of the Church, even when dogmatizing on her most vital doctrines, is hesitating and uncertain; and that she is often in contradiction with herself? Is she in a condition to define and control the faith of the world? But it may be said that the creeds and articles of Churches have a reference only to unity and peace; but let history teach us how far they have answered these important objects. Have they not brought the "sword" instead of "peace" into the Church of God? Have they produced religious unity or Christian fellowship? So far from it in these kingdoms, where the minds of men grow more vigorously than elsewhere, the

people have entirely outgrown their religious institutions, and are fluctuating between infidelity and dissent. The apparent excitement in our churches, so triumphantly appealed to as evidence of the revival of the popular creed, is the first rising of the tempest that is destined to overwhelm it. The zeal of the age is for knowledge and for truth; and, though it may for a moment pass into the dead forms of the old superstition, it will soon outgrow its narrow tenement. The world is about to complete the triumph of toleration by declaring that man shall no longer legislate for man in the concerns of his soul. The corruption of Religion arises, in a great degree, from the confusion of the provinces of faith and intellect. To attempt to build up our faith by facts or reasoning, is to subordinate the higher to the lower faculties of the soul. Let any man, deeply impressed with any spiritual truth, endeavour to embody his faith in words, or define it by a creed, and he will at once perceive the vanity and hopelessness of the task. But how much more vain and hopeless is it for one man, or set of men, to attempt to expound the faith of others. This was the error of Luther and the other reformers of his age. As Novalis has well said, Luther treated Christianity in "an arbitrary manner," and narrowed its spirit by minute definitions and philological subtleties. He condemned the schoolmen of his age, but he, nevertheless, followed in their footsteps; the only distinction between him

and them being, that he applied to the Scriptures the same arbitrary rules that they had applied to theology of the Church. How utterly at variance such a system of interpretation is with the spirit of Christianity, may be inferred from the absence of all creeds and articles of faith from the Christian Scriptures themselves. The vast idea of *an universal faith* is, evidently, the burden of these writings, but how little has it been realized in the history of any Church that has hitherto existed in the world. The foundation of our faith is in our consciousness*—this is the true basis of a Catholic creed, for to this alone will the awakened souls of men at last appeal. The truth of Christianity to every individual mind depends on its being the true interpreter of this inner conviction. "This," says Fichte, "is no verbal distinction, but a true and deep one, pregnant with the most important consequences to my character. Let me for ever hold fast by it. All my *conviction* is but *faith*, and it proceeds from the heart, and not from the understanding. Knowing this, I will enter into no dispute, for I perceive that in this way nothing can be gained. I will not suffer my conviction to be disturbed by it, for its source lies higher than all disputation. I will not attempt by reasoning to press my conviction upon others." If any one should consider the philosophy of Fichte vague or latitudinarian, let him remember where it is written,

* See Fichte's "Destination of Man," chap. x.

that faith is the "gift of God"—that we "cannot believe unless God open our hearts," and that the "spirit of God, like the wind, bloweth where it listeth"—that it is this holy spirit—this divine conscience, that alone gives life to the "dead letter" of Scripture itself.

I cannot quit the subject of the dogmatic system of the Church, without a brief allusion to the case of "Gorham *v.* the Bishop of Exeter," which, at the moment I am writing, is in the course of being argued in the ecclesiastical courts. There is hardly a single name illustrious in the annals of the Reformation, whose authority is not quoted on one side or the other, and *many on both*, by the contending advocates. Cranmer, Peter Martyr, Bucer, Jewel, Hooper, and a host of foreign names, together with the more modern authorities of Bancroft, Burnet, Hall, Stillingfleet, and Whitgift, are ingeniously made to support by their writings the most conflicting ideas of baptismal regeneration. The language of synod is quoted against synod, and conference against conference, on the same interesting subject. Now, however edifying this case may be from various causes to the "learned pundits" of the "Court of Arches," or to a few critical readers amongst the higher clergy, but one opinion can possibly exist amongst the unlearned laity, and a very large proportion of the clergy themselves, viz., that the Church has pronounced no intelligible opinion on the subject under discussion, and that

from the apostolic age down to the present times, the doctrine has been entirely afloat in the minds of believers. And yet, from the absurdity of the present laws of the Church, a polemical Bishop has the power of harassing and persecuting his clergy about a matter in which the Church has actually withheld her judgment. St. Augustin has mentioned somewhere in his "Confessions," the case of a young man being *converted* by being baptized *in a swoon*, a circumstance which leaves little doubt of the extreme *orthodoxy* on this point of that popular Father. I strongly recommend this story of the Bishop of Hippo to the notice of the Bishop of Exeter, who entertains so profound a veneration for "Catholic antiquity" and patristic wisdom.

The high Churchman in the nineteenth century appears to have the same notion of the efficacy of baptism, as the rude Christian soldiers of the age of Charlemagne, who baptized the vanquished barbarians at the point of the sword, or as the Jesuit missionaries of Spanish America, who, according to the historian*, converted by baptism five thousand Mexicans in a single day, thus more than rivalling the preaching of St. Peter.

How often must the beautiful language of A'Kempis occur to every sincere and spiritual mind, when harassed with these vain janglings of theology,

* See Robertson's America, vol. iii. page 295.

—"Oh God! who art the truth, make me one with Thee in everlasting love! I am *weary of reading, I am weary of hearing*—in Thee alone is the sum of my desires. Let all teachers be silent, let the whole creation be dumb before thee, and do thou ONLY speak to my soul."*

* See "Imitation of Christ," chap. III.

CHAPTER VI.

PROSPECTS AND CONCLUSION.

"In this age, which appears to us so much advanced, Christianity is still far from having received the full application it is capable of to the conscience and life of man—from having uttered its crowning word, or expressed its whole burden of thought. . . . . The world will not cease till Christianity has delivered its whole message."—ANONYMOUS (quoted by Ullman in his Preface to the "Essence of Christianity").

THE great majority of Protestants regard the Reformation as a final settlement of the essential doctrines of the Christian religion; and, though it will be found on inquiry that no two sects agree in the interpretation of these doctrines, they all agree in appealing to *some* common, and apparently yet undiscovered, standard of orthodoxy. The fact is, that the Reformation, instead of being the settlement, was the *unsettlement* of religion, and the settlement is reserved for generations yet unborn. To take a single example, the doctrine of the Eucharist;—we find the three most illustrious of the Reformers entertaining the most conflicting opinions; Luther holding the "corporeal," Calvin

the "real," and Zuinglius the "spiritual," presence of Christ in the elements. These venerable crotchets still retain a feeble and lingering vitality in the nineteenth century, being kept in remembrance by the still unreformed and semi-monastic studies of our universities. Oxford still continues to teach the logic of Aristotle, the subtle instrument of scholasticism, and to neglect the philosophy of Bacon. It would be easy to multiply examples of Protestant discordancy, both as regards the doctrines and discipline of the reformed Church.

The philosophical historian will regard as the keystone of the Reformation the assertion of the right of private judgment*; but, in the hands of the Churchmen of the sixteenth century, it became little more than a protest against the corruptions and absurdities which had become an intolerable scandal to the Christian Church; and they contemplated, probably, no higher object than restoring the ecclesiastical system to a condition of possible existence. It was the simple example of the triumph of a *sect*, of which ecclesiastical history affords so many in-

* "If," says Rousseau, "we infringe ever so little on the principle of private judgment, Protestantism instantly falls to the ground. If I am convinced to-day that I ought to submit to the decisions of others, I should to-morrow become a Catholic, and every honest and consistent man would do the same." Mr. Baptist Noel, in his philippic against the Church, and Dr. Whately in its defence, have, I find, quietly appropriated some of the once-considered infidel arguments of Rousseau. If this does not prove the inconsistency of Churchmen, it, at least, proves the progress of religious enlightenment.

stances, as well as of the abuses of the triumph. The Reformers of the sixteenth century had no greater zeal against idolatry and corruption, than the Iconoclasts of the eighth, or the Albigenses of the twelfth, and far less than their illustrious forerunners, Wickliffe in England, and Huss in Bohemia. They laid, indeed, the foundation for a far greater reformation than they effected, or probably intended, and whilst fondly clinging to the language of the schools, and the spirit of scholasticism, they asserted a principle (the right of private judgment) by which the doctrines of the Church are destined, in the progress of time, to be restored within the limits of reason and philosophy. Perhaps we may assume, with Gibbon, that "the patriot Reformers were ambitious of succeeding the tyrants they dethroned;" at any rate, they so far followed their example, that they left unrepealed the punishment of death for the crime of heresy, and Cranmer himself was burnt in the fire he had previously kindled for the Anabaptists.

Though the general spirit of modern Protestantism is still tainted with the vices of its origin, its purification is, in the present age, being gradually but steadily accomplished. The dangerous word "development" occasionally falls from the lips of the religious orator, and has even dropped incautiously from the pen of an Archbishop *. These are significant and hopeful omens, because the

* See Whately's "Kingdom of Christ," Essay II., page 157.

development of Christianity involves the abandonment of our idolatrous worship of the sacred writings.

In philosophical strictness, the abhorrence of idolatry which has distinguished the true prophets of all ages, is nothing more than a strong detestation of whatever is unreal and untrue*. Idolatry is the substitution of the symbol for the thing signified. Thus a written creed is substituted for the Divine law of conscience, and ceremonial worship for practical religion. The worship of the Bible is as gross idolatry as the worship of the "black stone" of the Caabah, which (if a meteoric stone) really fell from heaven, and was probably *seen* by its first worshippers. The idolatry of the present age is the veneration entertained for forms no longer significant, and doctrines that have ceased to represent its spiritual character. The illiterate laity of Protestantism have passed from counting a string of beads, or kneeling before a picture, to the no less insignificant utterance of a form of words †.

The Reformation of religion, then, which commenced on the revival of learning, must be regarded rather as the first feeble struggle against a vast accumulation of superstition and corruption, than as the actual achievement of our religious liberty. From the days of Wickliffe to the present moment—

* In this sense Bacon speaks of the "*idols* of the human mind."

† See Carlyle's "Heroes and Hero Worship," Lect. IV.

from the first protest of reason against the mummeries of the middle ages to the last effort of the modern unitarian, the eye of philosophy discovers nothing but a sustained contest between the antagonist forces of reason and superstition. The spiritual history of mankind is a standing commentary on the merits of the question at issue. The tendency of the human soul to rise to the adoration of the God of the universe is constantly checked by the imperfection of our knowledge, and the errors of education. Unable to worship in the great temple of the universe, and, by a familiarity with nature, to realize the idea of harmony and unity that pervades it, and therefore requiring a material object of worship, man, in the earliest ages, has been found to worship the most perfect of his own species*. He turns in despair from the open volume of nature as too profound for investigation, has no faith in the "divine significance of life," and readily conceives that God may have shut up all wisdom and all knowledge in the bosom of a priest, or "in the words of a book." The superstition that pervades even the most advanced condition of society is preserved by being interwoven with the holiest revelations of God to the human heart. The cultus of every nation and every sect, as I have

* The *first* form of human worship, according to Carlyle, is the worship of the brute powers of nature; but I am speaking of what may be properly called the commencement of civilization, when the intellect is first emancipated from the dominion of terror and wonder. —See "Heroes and Hero Worship," Lect. I.

elsewhere said, enshrines in its unmeaning ceremonies, and consecrates in its dogmatical absurdities, the purest elements of natural piety. Superstition is to religion what the ivy is to the oak—an evergreen and clinging parasite, fettering its branches and impeding its growth, and yet not altogether destitute of beauty and of grace. The transition from barbarism to civilization is slow and painful, and centuries are but moments in the age of nations. The highest minds of every period invariably retain some leaven of the superstitions against which they protest. The follies of the learned of past ages furnish a melancholy proof of the tenacity with which even the strongest minds cling to the traditions of superstition. We find Luther at one moment vigorously asserting the rights of conscience, and the next actually stumbling at the doctrine of transubstantiation. The man, however, who can read the picturesque religious history of the middle ages, and see nothing but the worst forms of monkery and credulity, may walk "from Dan to Beersheba," and say "all is barren." The coarse and undiscriminating assailants of Popery, the Stowells, the Macneils, the Closes, and Noels of modern polemics, are totally blind to the philosophy of religious history. The religious system of every age is interwoven with its social and political condition; and whilst in modern times a large proportion of the people of every country remain in the darkness of ignorance, some form of superstition will continue to be a necessary element in the

popular creed. *A general education is the only path to a spiritual faith.*

The encyclical letter of the present Pope (who is said to be so much more enlightened than his predecessors in the pontifical chair) may appear, indeed, a curious specimen of the *fossilized* intellect of an age long passed away, and, in the nineteenth century, we may be startled to hear from the spiritual guide of a large portion of the Christian world language fitted to the genius of the dark ages. But when we consider that the mass of mankind throughout Europe, though perhaps less illiterate, are not much better educated than in the days of Leo the Tenth, we can hardly wonder that the doctrines repudiated by the Reformers of the sixteenth century still find favour in the minds of the people.

The existence of Popery in such an age as the present is a proof of the tenacity with which the minds of men cling to the *realities* of religion. Popery exists on the memories of the past, for the religion of the middle ages was a far more real and consoling creed than the protesting and disputatious system of modern times*. The Church of the middle ages was far more *Catholic* than that of the Reformation. The spiritual desires and objects of the people, indeed, were few and feeble, but, such as

* The "Truce of God," so religiously observed by the fierce and warlike people of the eleventh century, is a striking instance of the reality of religious influences, and of their power of controlling the violence of human passions. See Schlegel's "Philosophy of History," Lect. XIV.

they were, the Church was able, to a great degree, to satisfy them; and the Catholicity of her ministrations was rewarded by a dutiful and unreserved obedience. The world has now passed into a new phase in her progress, and the Church has lost her ancient unity without acquiring any new principle of outward communion. The laity, perhaps, once, for a brief period, really reposed in peace under the shadow of the Church. Ever since the Reformation, the minds of men have been waiting for a new form to arise out of the spiritual chaos, and hitherto they have waited in vain. It is the sense of this want that is turning the minds of many sincere and thoughtful men with a sentiment of superstitious reverence towards "Catholic antiquity." They have begun to fear that the sentiment of veneration is dying out of the world. This is the only source of that influence which Popery still exercises over the educated portion of mankind. She is the despotism that is preferred to anarchy; and men fly to her for safety amidst the convulsions of revolution, from motives analagous to those which have just induced thirty millions of Frenchmen to sacrifice their liberties for the shadow of a government, and the name of a Buonaparte.

Disorder is equally repulsive to the social and spiritual instincts of mankind, and once more the world is beginning to seek for a true Catholicity. The Church of the middle ages reflected, if it did not raise, the spiritual character of the people. The Church of to-day is the very Babel of discord,

in which we hear the confused utterances of philosophy and superstition, and the conflicting language of reason and authority. An age of infidelity, it is well known, succeeded the Reformation of religion, as well as the entire corruption of its ministers. The secularized priest became a venal trader in the temporalities of the Church, and the sacred office of the preacher and prophet was shamelessly assumed as a worldly "profession."

This degradation of the first principles of religion was met by the fierce and fanatical protest of the Puritans, who, in their burning zeal for the revival of the faith, restored to life, with the purer element, a large proportion of the ancient superstitions. The modern Puritans are still carrying on the war bequeathed to them by their forefathers, against the formalism of orthodoxy; but, as they have succeeded to a large share of the temporalities of the Church, and are free from the stimulus of persecution, they have neither the zeal nor the honesty of their illustrious ancestors. A bastard liberalism, half religious and half political, has been substituted for the earnest desire for the revival of Christian ethics, and the dream of a theocracy.

The horror of Popery that haunts the imagination of the modern Puritan is, however, nothing more than an exquisite sensibility of the possible success of a rival sect. If the character of the Romish Church is really reflected in her creeds and confessions, and her genius displayed in her dogmatical teaching, it is hard to conceive, in

times like the present, the source of those pious terrors that distract the minds of "Evangelical" Christians, and wake the echoes of Exeter Hall. If, in the language of Dr. Chalmers*, we may expect, without our strenuous exertions, that the progress of Popery "will bury Protestantism, in all its varieties, in one common ruin," it is hardly consistent in the same writer to describe, as a merely "debasing superstition," the supposed parent of this great spiritual apostacy. Surely the Protestantism of the present age is not of so delicate a structure as to fear collision with a superannuated superstition, and, if it be, it must have inherited some original defect in its constitution from the ancient Church. This amiable writer appears to have laboured under religious terrors, as unfounded as those so humorously ascribed to "Peter Plymley" by the late facetious prebendary of St. Paul's. The fact is, that sectarians are so engrossed with their contests with each other—Evangelical against Puseyite, Wesleyan against Socinian, and all combined against Popery—that they overlook the real danger of their position—the silent growth of philosophy, or, as they would consider it, of infidelity.

But what is the present condition, and what are the future prospects, of the Romish Church amongst the nations of Europe? Does the "debasing superstition" she inculcates increase in those countries where she enjoys the political advantage of

* See Pamphlet on "Evangelical Alliance."

being connected with the state—in France, in Italy, in Spain, or in Belgium? Are the people in these countries more debased by superstition than they were a century ago? The evidence of every traveller of every class will at once negative the supposition. The Church of Rome, like every other religious body, is growing gradually into conformity with the spirit of the time. The "Holy Coat of Treves," after having excited a commotion that has been dignified by the name of a "New Reformation," has, no doubt, been exhibited for the last time to the adoration of the faithful. The Jesuits, after having been hunted through Europe for the last century, are at last expelled even from the mountain fastnesses of Switzerland, and from Rome itself.

Without subscribing to the heroics of Gioberti, or assuming that the Italian peninsula is destined to be the central and flowery land from which the tide of civilization is destined to flow to all the nations of the earth, we may still recognise in the course of passing events (in spite of the continued fluctuation of political passions) the commencement of the regeneration of Italy. No better evidence can be given of the advancing liberality of the Romish Church, than the fate and fortunes of Gioberti's book—the "Primato." During the pontificate of Gregory XVI. this book was actually proscribed; in the course of time it was quietly countenanced by the Court of Sardinia; by degrees the lay clergy timidly adopted it, and now (in the pontificate of Pius IX.) it has become the text

book even of the monastic orders; and its distinguished author, instead of being an expatriated liberal, is Prime Minister to the King of Sardinia*.

On the continent of Catholic Europe it is still possible that the priest, as in the dark ages, should be the spiritual leader of the people, as is evident from the histories of Ronge and Gioberti. In this country a similar leadership is impossible, as the people are advanced far beyond the spirit of their religious institutions, and the enlightenment of the priesthood. A race of true prophets, inspired by the new, and *yet unuttered*, spirituality of the age, can alone re-establish amongst us the natural relations of the priesthood and the laity.

It cannot be denied, however, that the fabric of superstition is in every country being now gradually shaken by the progress of knowledge; and the best friends of a spiritual religion will probably consider that the rate of progress is even sufficiently fast for the real happiness of mankind. "Revolutions," religious or political, "are not made with rose-water," and though we need not fear in the present state of the world a recurrence of the social convulsions of ruder times, it is far safer to await a slow and steady amelioration of our institutions, political and religious, by the gradual elevation of the masses, than to elicit a crude and prurient development of their latent but terrible power.

The great revolution that assuredly awaits the

* The abdication of the King of Sardinia has occurred since the above was written.

religious world will, I believe, be nothing more than a quiet revolution of human opinion; and such a revolution has in fact already commenced. The sudden and violent convulsions that heralded the Reformations of a darker age, and which shook society to its foundations, lighted the fires of persecution, and caused the scaffold to flow with the blood of martyrs, is not to be expected from the mild and tolerant spirit of modern times. If a Reformer should now arise on whom had fallen the mantle of Wickliffe or of Luther, it is difficult to imagine against what he would specially protest as the prevailing superstition—so numerous, so shifting, and so many-coloured are the phases of religious opinion. It would be absolutely impossible to discover, in this spiritual chaos, the principles out of which martyrs are made, or sensible revolutions compounded.

One great principle, however, appears to mark the character of the age, the principle of free and fearless inquiry into matters hitherto veiled from the gaze of the vulgar; and the esoteric teaching of every Church and every sect is openly challenged by a curious and critical laity. The world is beginning to seek with solemn earnestness for the sources, not only of ecclesiastical authority, but of *spiritual* dominion. A time is rapidly approaching (if we are not even now in the midst of it) when the attitude of revelation itself, in its relations to human thought, must be considerably modified or totally changed. The awakened intellect of the world will

no longer consent to live on the "sere remains" of the past.

A great degradation of the principles from which the world derived its present spiritual philosophy has occurred during the lapse of ages, and the tendency of the minds of men is to recur to the fountain for a purer inspiration. This degradation of principles is the common fortune of all religions and all philosophies. No sooner does some great and original thinker, in science, religion or philosophy, discover a new fact or a new principle that challenges the assent of mankind, than he is surrounded by a host of servile copyists, or fanatical followers, who, being uninspired by the original revelation, and taking the idea feebly and at second-hand, commence the work of perversion and degradation. In a single generation the master idea is commonly lost amidst the wrangling of unworthy disciples; and the very means adopted to insure its diffusion—the principle of association—is the ordinary cause of its perversion. The great mass of mankind neither think their own thoughts, nor even speak their own language. They adopt the dead forms, and speak the dead phrases of by-gone generations.

Thus we find the religionist of the nineteenth century clothing his theology in the phraseology of the middle ages, and uttering his listless prayers in a fashionable chapel, in the burning words of the old martyrs, whose whispered and trembling orisons were breathed amidst the fires of persecution. "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the

hands of Esau." Thus is all connection absolutely lost between the form and the spirit of religious establishments, and sects, that sprung originally from the ashes of martyrs, preserve in the easy and tolerant circumstances of modern times the glowing language of their birth. Thus, like the lover of Portia, the modern saint borrows, as it were, his clothing from every country, and wears at once the cowl of St. Bernard, the cloak of Wittenberg, and the cap of Geneva, and in this motley garb exults in the Catholic unity of his religious costume!

Thus, too, it comes to pass, that the popular creed has really no hold on the affections of the people, whose feelings are not educated in religious history, and romance, and who desire rather the actual revelations and living Faith of the present hour, than the recorded raptures of dead saints, or the spiritual picture of distant ages. The faith of the educated Christian is founded on the whole history of his religion. It is absurd to say that he takes his creed solely from the Scriptures, when, from his earliest years, his mind is nurtured on the accumulated learning of scholastic theology and ecclesiastical history. But all this is a sealed book to the unlearned laity. To them, it is of more importance to know how God is *now* dealing with his people, than to speculate on his early manifestation to Jews and Gentiles, or his later and more doubtful presence in the providential history of His Church. The faith that depends on historical knowledge belongs, exclusively, to those whose business or

pleasure may lead them to this literary banquet—a coarser and homelier, and, perhaps, a healthier diet, must be found for those who have neither the taste, the leisure, nor the learning, to leaven their spiritual concerns with the luxuries of an elegant literature. It is quite certain that "the million" amongst formal believers are in one or other of these two conditions—they are either vaguely or imperfectly trusting to the simplest principles of natural religion, or they are receiving on human authority a human explanation of the "inspired" writings. A more Catholic creed for the sincere and spiritual may surely be found, than either that which consists in a feeble and doubting recognition of reason and conscience, or in the total abnegation of all privileges of a moral being.

If we examine the Christian Scriptures, with a mind free from the prejudices induced by what is called a "religious education," we shall find that Christianity is there revealed to us as a religion without priests * (in the pagan sense of the word, ἱερεῖς) without a temple, and without sacrifices. The "sacrifices of God" are the "contrite spirit," and the work of mercy and of charity—the "temple of the Holy Ghost" is the heart of the believer, and its single priest, "the great High Priest of our profession." This is not a matter of inference, but is directly taught in the Christian writings, and is, in fact, strictly in unison with the whole system of

* See Whately's "Kingdom of Christ," page 133.

Christianity, which was, in this respect, diametrically opposed to all existing religions, the Jewish amongst the rest. Again, it must be admitted that the religion of Christ is capable of indefinite development; at least within the limits of its defined and indisputable *principles*. "We may advance—we may lead others to advance *indefinitely* in the full development of Gospel truth," are the words of one of its ablest and most enlightened expounders, who occupies, moreover, the highest rank in the Christian Church *. The Christian writings contain no creeds or confessions of Faith, such as those invented by the Church at a later period, and which have had the uniform effect, at all times, of narrowing the basis of Christian communion, and filling the world with heresy and persecution. It is really difficult to imagine upon what grounds any Protestant sect can defend the use of articles of *Faith*, without conceding a more than human authority to those who compile them, as the consecrated depositaries of "*that* faith that was once delivered to the saints," and thus allowing the most arrogant assumptions of Popery. That men, associated for a common purpose, such as the inculcation of Christian ethics (leaving the *doctrines* from which they may be supposed to spring to approve themselves to the hearts and understandings of the associated body), should protect themselves with rules to insure the order of their proceedings, and to

* Dr. Whately, Archbishop of Dublin. See "Kingdom of Christ," page 157.

enable them to expel unworthy members, is the utmost *authority* that may be conceded to them. To define the *faith* of its members is to assume a power over the invisible and secret instincts of conscience, which belongs to God alone.

Our Protestant Reformers had assuredly no intention of restoring the Christian Church to its primitive model. They protested against the idolatry of image and saint-worship and the adoration of the host, but they established in their place the *worship of the Bible*. What is, at most, the record of God's word was exalted to the rank of the Divine word itself; and those sacred records, which have since furnished arguments to a thousand sects, and for ten thousand shades of human opinion, were allowed an authority above that great unwritten law which speaks a common language to every human heart. Instead of allowing that Divine spirit (which the writings themselves declare to be their own proper interpreter) to expound their meaning, the writings were supposed to confine and expound the operation of the spirit; and the Church still continued to usurp the character of an infallible teacher, by dogmatically and arbitrarily settling the sense of scripture. In fact, in no single respect do the reformers appear to have entirely emancipated themselves from the thraldom of the ancient superstitions. They protested, for instance, against "Orders" as a Christian sacrament, but they still retained a superstitious notion of the ordination of ministers and the spiritual efficacy of

the imposition of hands. The word *ordination* still remained a consecrated word. If they had read in the Scripture that the Apostles *appointed lecturers* instead of "*ordained* elders in every city," though this would probably have equally well expressed the historical fact, it would not have conveyed the same impression to their minds. The same halting policy was exhibited in retaining, in a mutilated form, the power of absolution.

The most liberal section of modern Christians are professedly those who derive their theology from this tainted source, and the nineteenth century is not ashamed to confess that she, even feebly, expresses the deep spiritual insight of the age of judicial astrology, of witch-burning, and the alchemists! The Evangelical orator of the present age considers that his Protestantism is sufficiently vindicated by a violent and indiscriminating protest against Popery; but, in reality, he should be regarded rather as the jealous rival, than as the honest opponent of the ancient Church. He is anxious to change the form, rather than to abolish the principle, of spiritual despotism. He invites the aid of the laity, indeed, against what he calls the Romanizing spirit of the orthodox Church, and would popularize the Establishment to the very verge of voluntaryism; but this is simply to insure the aid of a powerful ally against a dangerous rival. If the Tractarian party had been more successful in their chivalrous attempt to rebuild the ancient citadel of the faith, the low Churchman would have

gladly sacrificed all the external defences of a "visible Church" to have averted their triumph; and, like a desperate pirate, would have fired the magazine and destroyed his crew and his craft, rather than submit to the insolence of the conqueror. I have no doubt that the laity, who are thus invited to fight the battles of conscience, will, like the Prætorian guards, seize upon the empire they are invoked to defend; and that they will have sufficient penetration to discover that they will gain little or nothing by a mere change of spiritual dynasties.

From this popular element, now so freely admitted into the Christian Church, I anticipate the purification of the popular creed. Everything I have noticed in these pages as peculiarly characterizing the present condition of the Church indicates the *transition* state of our religious philosophy. In days of ignorance and barbarism the world has, no doubt, been often indebted for its progress in civilization to the "courageous enlightenment of priests,"* but mankind has now become far *wiser than their creeds*, far more enlightened than their religious teachers. The true priesthood of every age is composed of those who have the deepest insight into the realities of the spiritual life—those who have faith themselves and can give faith to others in the endless possibilities of the soul—the faith by which mountains are removed. In the

* See Appendix to Bulwer's "England and the English."

preaching of this faith, the lecture-room is now far in advance of the pulpit. Listen to the words of a true seer, calling back a faithless age to the "knowledge of God," and the immortal destinies of man. "All true work is religion, and whatsoever religion is not work may go and dwell among the Brahmins, Antinomians, Spinning Dervishes, or where it will —with me it shall have no harbour. Admirable was that saying of the old monks, 'Laborare est orare.' Older than all preached gospels was this unpreached, inarticulate, but ineradicable, for-ever-enduring gospel. Work, and therein have well-being. Man, son of earth and of heaven, lies there not in the innermost heart of thee a spirit of active method, a force for work, which burns like a painfully smouldering fire, giving thee no rest until thou unfold it—till thou write it down in beneficent facts around thee? What is immethodic waste, thou shalt make methodic, regulated, arable, obedient, and productive to thee. Wherever thou findest disorder, there is thy eternal enemy—attack him swiftly, subdue him, make *order* of him—the subject, not of Chaos, but of Intelligence, Divinity, and Thee! The thistle that grows in thy path, dig it out, that a blade of useful grass, a drop of nourishing milk, may grow there instead. . . . But, above all, where thou findest ignorance, stupidity, brute-mindedness, ... smite, smite in the name of God! The highest God does audibly so command thee: still audibly if thou have ears to hear. He, even He, with His unspoken voice,

awfuller than any Sinai thunders or syllabled speech of whirlwinds." * And again to cheer the drooping spirits, and raise the despairing and unbelieving soul to its heaven-appointed task—"Every noble work is at first impossible. In very truth, for every noble work the possibilities will lie diffused through immensity, inarticulate, undiscoverable, except *to faith.* Like Gideon, thou shalt spread out thy fleece at the door of thy tent, and see whether under the wide arch of heaven there be any bounteous moisture or none. Thy heart and life purpose shall be as a miraculous Gideon's fleece, spread out in silent appeal to heaven." † These are true words coming fresh from the depths of the human soul, and spreading their divine contagion amongst all who hear them—the voice of a prophet speaking to his nation, and reproving the backsliding of his age. The peculiarity of the present time is the increasing number and influence of these unanointed prophets, who are imperceptibly leavening the moral character of the age.

The gradual intrusion of laymen into some of the most important functions of the priestly office, even in the humble characters of "lay-assistants" and "Scripture-readers," and, still more, as lecturers on ecclesiastical history, is significant of its insecure and unsatisfactory condition.

I am now about to approach the most delicate and difficult part of the work I have undertaken in

* See Carlyle's "Past and Present," page 270.

† Ibid. page 268.

these pages. I shall, undoubtedly, be told that the concessions I require from the popular creed involve the total abandonment of the established cultus; and that the religious forms of the vulgar, at least, are the essential basis of their morality. I shall probably be required to supply a new cultus to expound my new theology, and to impress it on the minds of the people. I am fully aware that forms of worship are necessary to impress the truths of religion on the bulk of mankind, but I am equally certain that all real and significant forms are the *result* and not the cause of a vital religion. A religious cultus, like a political constitution, is the growth and offspring of public opinion, and a constitution composed in Downing Street, or a cultus at Lambeth, will express little more than the minds of their authors, and be totally inadequate to represent the religious or political sentiment of a nation. At present, we are acting on totally different principles in our religious and political affairs. We despise the *politics* of the Tudors, whilst we accept, without complaint, their rule of faith and their forms of devotion; and we force the spirit of the nineteenth century into the narrow limits of the Protestant Reformation. We live in a religion of outward signs and symbols. *All* is written in books, preached in pulpits, or expounded on platforms. The inner and individual life of man receives no development from our religious philosophy. "There is abroad, everywhere," as an eloquent writer complains, "a spirit of cowardly compromise

and seeming which intimates a frightful scepticism, a life without love, an activity without an aim." We appear to have lost all faith in the Divine beauty of life, and the true inspiration of genius. The want of invention and originality is betrayed by the condition of the fine arts, as well as of religion. The most successful of our artists are the closest copyists of the great originals of antiquity; and the highest compliment we can pay to West or Wilson is to compare them to Rafaelle or to Claude. It is not to be wondered at, that we are content to borrow our religion from the Jews, whilst we are indebted to the dark and middle ages for the models of our architecture, and to the Greeks for the exemplars of our sculpture. The word "Gothic" is used indifferently, to describe what is barbarous in morals, and refined in taste, and is at once a term of veneration and contempt. We conclude, in the same spirit, that the art of sculpture expired with the Greeks, and that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures contain the last communication from God to man.

Our present forms of worship, and articles of Faith, were the imperfect expression of that great rise in the waters of religious opinion that produced the Reformation. I say "imperfect," because we find the Puritans, the most earnest of believers, almost immediately after that great event, in protest against the work of their own hands; and time has only strengthened the inveteracy of their dislike to the established forms. At no time since their

establishment have these forms or articles been a fair expression of the religious sentiment of the nation, whose opposition to them was, during the Rebellion, stronger than the power of the Crown, and the prestige of the Church; and it was, no doubt, the political, rather than the religious shortcomings of the Puritans, that caused the subsequent reaction against them. Using even the test of numbers (if we exclude the non-religious portion of the people, all of whom are reckoned as Churchmen), it is probable that the Puritan section was, and still is, the most important body of *believers*. All "false and weak brethren" are naturally drawn into the pale of the establishment by worldly motives, or a faithless timidity. Ambition, no doubt, may have inspired some leaders of the popular party, but purer and more habitual instincts must have influenced the mass of the people. If, therefore, we should abolish the whole cultus of the Church (though this is by no means necessary or desirable), such a step might be regarded as the triumph of a religious party, rather than as a second Reformation.

As I have no belief, however, in the possibility of devising a cultus which shall express the religious sentiment of the age, I am content to leave untouched the established forms of public worship, until they are gradually amended by the diffusion of a sounder theology. Of the ministering clergy I require, alone, that they suffer, as far as possible, that "judgment should go by default" where they

have no rational plea for the defence of an insignificant rite or obsolete form. If the Church will not speak the truth, let her at least be silent. If she will not inform—if she fears to enlighten the consciences of her hearers, let her, at least, cease to mystify and deceive them. The concession I require is far less than her bigoted supporters are willing to believe; for her *authority* is hourly decreasing, and every attempt to restore it but hastens its decline. I demand nothing more than the silence of ecclesiastical authority, where it has no jurisdiction,—that it cease to dogmatise where it has no longer the power to coerce. I would not *destroy* the corrupt religious system under which we are living, but, by removing extraneous support, allow it to die a natural death; thus making way for the free expression of those spiritual instincts which produce the real and significant cultus of every nation. The language of our forms no longer describes the actual feelings and wants of the worshippers, except in the expression of those general sentiments of natural religion which are common to all times, and its hold on the affections of the people (if hold it has) is founded on a sickly sentiment for antiquity alone. It is thus, by for ever looking back, that the Church neglects her office as the leader of Christian civilization, and allows the world to outgrow her ordinances, and neglect her instructions. To the best and purest of her ministers, her cumbrous and antiquated machinery is daily becoming more and more an

incumbrance and a snare, and the brightest ornaments of her communion are those who virtually renounce their allegiance to her laws.

The honest defenders of the spirituality of the Church amongst her clergy are simply called upon openly to profess what so many of them secretly believe. Let no honest preacher any longer continue to teach what he believes to be unreal and untrue, even though it may be consecrated by the formularies of the Church. Let the people, at least, be freed from the burden of rites and ceremonies no longer significant, or which have a positive tendency to divert their minds from the spiritual objects of their faith. Let them no longer be taught that the imposition of hands can convey the gift of the Holy Ghost—that the water in Baptism can wash away our sins, or that the Eucharist is more than a commemorative rite. The abrogation of rites and ceremonies, confessedly obsolete or actually pernicious, would be at least a step towards a more earnest and genuine belief.

The clergy who shall thus vindicate their principles have really little to fear from the severity of episcopal authority. In every sense is the corrupted Church divided against itself. Rural deans are petitioning the legislature for security for the *faith of their Bishops**, and whole parishes for

* See Debates in House of Lords, March 1st, 1849, on a Petition presented by Lord Lyttelton.

staying the episcopal crusade against seceding clergymen.

The great object in the Reformation of the external government of the Church is the restoration of the *legitimate* relations of the priesthood and the people: that is, to insure the highest offices in her administration to those who have the deepest spiritual insight, and utterly to exclude from the sacred band all faithless, feeble, and insincere instructors. Only so far as this object is realized will the Church be able in these times to lead the civilization of the world. Every sect of Christians, almost every school of philosophers, acknowledge, in some sense, the doctrine of spiritual influences, of our allegiance to a power beyond the visible world, and the immortality of the soul. These are Catholic truths, and, except in the wantonness of wickedness, mankind has never abandoned them. Even the dregs of the expiring "Convention," in the lowest degradation of the Revolution in France, were obliged, by the violated instincts of the people, to respect the majesty of God and the destiny of man. The whole theory of *Faith*, in fact, as distinguished from knowledge, is founded on the acknowledgement of invisible powers; and they who, in every age, have been distinguished by their faithful apprehension of this great mystery, and who by words of power have been able to present it as a spiritual *reality* to the souls of men, are the natural priesthood of the world. These primary revelations will never die out of the world, but they may be and

have been obscured by the dogmas of churches, which have "taught, for doctrines, the commandments of men." Neither Christ nor his Apostles left any cultus for the expression of these imperishable truths, though a cultus appears immediately to have followed the diffusion of the new faith, and to have been the harbinger of its corruption. From the Christian writings themselves, we learn that the foundation of churches was the commencement of heresy, and the extinction of the true catholicity of the doctrine of Christ. The experience of eighteen centuries sufficiently proves that this catholicity is obstructed rather than advanced by the dogmatism that would define it, and the authority that would enforce its acceptance. There is not the slightest analogy, as has been sometimes supposed, between political and spiritual coercion. We readily abandon a portion of our natural freedom to insure the enjoyment of the rest, and we acknowledge the authority of laws which secure us the blessings of security and order. "The obedience of a free people," it has been said, "is nothing more than assent to laws which they *themselves* have enacted." * But, in the concerns of the soul, all but the brutalized and degraded reject all authority but that of God, that made of His spirit, which enlightens them. This great spiritual fact is written in letters of flame on the character of the present times, to the terror of the timid and to the joy of the hopeful. The long night of darkness—

* See "Letters of Junius," Letter I.

of practical unbelief, and of formalism, that succeeded the Reformation, and has almost ever since covered the land—will pass away before the rising light of a deeper religious philosophy, and religion will once more become a *reality*.

Alluding to the revival of Christianity (though writing in the midst of the horrors of revolution), the "prophetic soul" of Novalis foreshadowed the history of the present century. "That the time of her resurrection hath come no historical mind can deny, for even the very events that seemed directed against her existence—that threatened her downfall—have become the most favourable symptoms of her regeneration. *From the destruction of every positive institution she raises aloft her glorious head, as a new foundress of the world.* . . . . The spirit of God moveth over the waters, and a heavenly island is visible on the receding waves, to become the abode of renovated humanity—the well-spring of eternal life." * Well does the same gifted writer compare to the labours of Sisyphus the attempts of statesmen to keep up the ancient establishments of Christianity, without communicating to them some purer elements than they now possess to attract them towards heaven. This is, indeed, the "palpitation of a new period, and whoever has felt it cannot doubt its coming. . . . . These are its first throes—let each one be in readiness for the birth!"

By suggesting, however, what I consider a more

* "Christianity, or Europe," page 24 (Catholic Series).

true and Catholic theology, and by exposing some actual superstitions in the popular creed, I have no hope of producing any immediate or sensible effect on the Church herself. The most I can hope for or desire is to influence a few earnest minds, who may help to diffuse the leaven which is already at work from without.

The transition from a belief in Christ as God, to a belief in him as (in the simple language of Scripture) "his only begotten son," his "well-beloved" —the most inspired of our race—the most sacred vehicle of that "Holy Spirit" that "God giveth to *all* men liberally," is not so violent as may at first sight appear to those whose minds have been emasculated by the refinements of scholasticism. The "*inspiration of the Scriptures*," in the popular sense of the words, is even now a declining doctrine in the Church herself, mystified by various and conflicting opinion, and giving "an uncertain sound" to the popular ear. A belief in *miracle and prophecy* is becoming daily less and less necessary as the means of inculcating a faith in the invisible things of God, in proportion as the inner miracles of the human heart and intellect are being made known by the diffusion of spiritual knowledge. *Creeds and confessions* are almost imperceptibly, but surely, losing their authority over the minds of men under the expanding influence of intelligence and toleration.

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12.—Popular Christianity: its Transition State and probable Development. By Frederick J. Foxton, A.B., formerly of Pembroke College, Oxford, and Perpetual Curate of Stoke Prior, and Dockton, Herefordshire. London: John Chapman, 142, Strand. 1849.

We can, in the present notice, do little more than give a short summary of the contents of this volume, which, like Mr. Froude's 'Nemesis of Faith,' emanates from a member of the Establishment, and one, moreover, like the author of the 'Nemesis,' trained for the priesthood in that stronghold of orthodoxy, Oxford. We have not heard that Mr. Foxton's book has yet shared the same fate as Mr. Froude's; it is not improbable that the authorities have learned wisdom from experience, and have come to a knowledge of the fact, that the surest way to render a man or a book popular, is to persecute the one and to burn the other, whenever the religious opinions of either happen to clash with those of their judges.*

In brief, then, Mr. Foxton, in this treatise, teaches that the Scriptures are not inspired, in the usual acceptation of the term; that miracles are "*per se* incredible," in the sense in which they are received by the church; that prophecy is the "far-seeing insight of genius" into things which are to be hereafter, and, as such, is properly distinguished by our author from the "supernatural pretensions of empiricism." He contends for the simple humanity of Christ, but in so doing seeks not to weaken his hold upon human affection, but rather to increase and confirm it; that doctrines and articles of faith are but the emanations of human intellect—theologians having first invented a system of doctrines, and then dignified by the name of *faith* the acceptance of those doctrines by the laity; and, lastly, that we are even now in a state of transition—that a spiritual revolution has actually commenced, which, without any of the sudden and violent convulsions that heralded and attended the reformations of the darker ages, shall effect greater and far more strongly marked effects, by modifying, or totally changing the attitude of revelation in all its relations to human thought and human belief. All these points are argued with much force, and are propounded in a very fair and candid spirit, the author evincing no disposition to beg the question, which, whenever difficulties present themselves, is viewed in all its bearings.

The following passage—the concluding one in the volume—contains a summary of the whole matter:—

"The transition from a belief in Christ as God, to a belief in him as (in the simple language of Scripture) 'his only begotten son,' his 'well-beloved'—the most inspired of our race—the most

* Exemplified in the case of the 'Nemesis of Faith,' a second edition of which has just appeared.

sacred vehicle of that 'Holy Spirit' that 'God giveth to all men liberally,' is not so violent as may at first sight appear to those whose minds have been emasculated by the refinements of scholasticism. The '*inspiration of the Scriptures*,' in the popular sense of the words, is even now a declining doctrine in the Church herself, mystified by various and conflicting opinions, and giving 'an uncertain sound' to the popular ear. A belief in *miracle and prophecy* is becoming daily less and less necessary as the means of inculcating a faith in the invisible things of God, in proportion as the inner miracles of the human heart and intellect are being made known by the diffusion of spiritual knowledge. *Creeds and confessions* are almost imperceptibly, but surely losing their authority over the minds of men, under the expanding influence of intelligence and toleration."—p. 226.

The introductory chapter "On the Condition of the Churches," will, we believe, be read with interest by all thinking men, however much they may dissent from the positions laid down in the succeeding chapters. The picture of the present anomalous condition of the Christian world, given in this chapter, is too true, and sad as true. The following extract from the preface will be recognised by every candid mind, as conveying a correct idea of the state of religion in our own country; the evils of this state must remain until the pure spirit of religion is substituted for the dogmatical forms which now obtain.

"The state of religious anarchy so visible around us, is acknowledged by the convulsive struggles, both of churchmen and dissenters, for the attainment of some definite principle of permanence and repose; and, after the vain experience of eighteen centuries, men still dream of establishing Christianity on the basis of a dogmatic theology. Everything is being done for the Church except giving her a Catholic spirit. When she has no audible voice for the people, a vain cry is raised for the increase of her churches, and the augmentation of her ministers, that she may extend the circle of her acknowledged inefficiency. Men ask for religion and are answered by churches—they ask for bread and receive a stone.

"The material interests of the Church alone occupy the minds of statesmen, who appear to im-

" When they were all gone, Peter slipped back to my father, who was putting on his brogues in a corner. 'Con,' says he, 'ye did it all well; but sure that was a joke about the two acres at the cross.'

" 'Of course it was, Peter!' says he. 'Sure it was all a joke, for the matter of that. Won't I make the neighbours laugh hearty to-morrow when I tell them all about it!'

" 'You wouldn't be mean enough to betray me!' says Peter, trembling with fright.

" 'Sure you wouldn't be mean enough to go

*TK - 536 - 280 *